

GWYNETT OF
THORNHAUGH

FREDERICK W. HAYES

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GWYNETT OF THORNHAUGH

A Romance

BY

FREDERICK W. HAYES, A.R.A.

Author of "A Kent Squire"



WITH

SIXTEEN FULL PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

BY THE AUTHOR

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TO
MY MOTHER

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PROLOGUE

IT has elsewhere* been narrated that in the late autumn in the year 1711 (when negotiations were pending between the governments of Queen Anne and Louis XIV. to terminate the nine years' war of the Spanish Succession), a brig named the *Fleur de Lys* arrived at Calais.

She was in charge of Mr. Ambrose Gwynett, a young Jacobite gentleman of Kent who had recently served with the French forces in Spain in defence of Philippe V. (grandson of Louis XIV.) against the emperor of Germany.

On board this ship, secreted behind the sheathing of the lazarette after a fashion which had been devised by Mr. Gwynett, were certain chests of gold, sent by Philippe V. to Louis XIV., to enable the latter to buy off the duke of Marlborough (generalissimo of the Allies) from any further hostile action against France.

At an interview between the marquis de Torcy (the French foreign secretary) and the duke, the latter agreed to accept £1,000,000 sterling as a consideration for promising to sheath his sword finally, should the emperor continue the war independently of peace being made between France and England.

Accordingly the *Fleur de Lys* (which had been given to Mr. Gwynett by Louis XIV.), with £1,000,000 of the treasure still left in its hiding-place, was lent to the duke, and by him placed in charge of one captain Kermode, to be convoyed from the Hague to London by a queen's ship, the *Mermaid*.

But the *Fleur de Lys* and the *Mermaid* were separated the night of their departure from Holland, and it was not till about a month later that Kermode arrived at Marlborough House and reported to the duke that the

*See "A Kent Squire."

brig had caught fire and sunk at sea, he and the crew having been rescued by the *Royal Mary*, a schooner owned and manned by four half-brothers of his own, who had brought him to England.

* * * * *

Mr. Gwynett was betrothed to a young lady whose father, Mr. Randolph Dorrington, of Dorrington Hall, Devon, had mysteriously disappeared in May, 1694, a short time before her own birth and her mother's death.

Muriel Dorrington and madam Rostherne, a widowed aunt by whom she had been brought up, were neighbors of the Wrays, of Wray Manor, a property adjoining Mr. Gwynett's. Muriel's bosom friend Avise, a niece of squire Wray, was engaged to the squire's son Noel, who happened also to be Gwynett's early playmate and most intimate friend.

A certain abbé Gaultier (a French agent employed by lord Oxford and Mr. Henry St. John—afterwards lord Bolingbroke—in the secret *pour-parlers* with Louis XIV.'s government) was a suitor for Muriel's hand. He resented malignantly her preference for Gwynett, and made several attempts upon the life of the latter—who, however, remained entirely unaware both of his enemy's identity and of his motives.

One of these attempts, in which Gwynett narrowly escaped being burnt alive, was aided by the collusion of a friend of Gaultier's, one père Germont (curé of the hamlet of Ste. Marie Geneste), who secretly carried on the manufacture of perfumes, drugs and poisons, which were sold in Paris by his niece, a herbalist named Marie Latour. This woman had a *liaison* with Charles Sanson, public executioner to the city of Paris, whose little son had on one occasion been cured of a dangerous seizure, through the exercise by Gwynett of a certain magnetic gift of healing which he possessed in a somewhat notable degree.

A second attempt on Gwynett's life was frustrated by Randolph Dorrington, who had just escaped to England, after a close imprisonment in France of seventeen years' duration. The evening before his escape, which was arranged by M. de Torcy, he had learned confidentially from that gentleman that he owed his imprisonment to the fact that he had unwittingly been the bearer of lord Marl-

borough's famous "Brest letter" of May 4th, 1694, to the exiled James II., betraying William III.'s intended expedition against Brest under the command of general Talmash.

M. de Torcy's information about this letter, the disastrous failure of the attack on Brest, and the resulting death of his foster-brother and cherished friend Talmash, had filled Dorrington with a burning resentment against Marlborough. But he had promised de Torcy, in the event of regaining his liberty, to make no move against the duke until de Torcy had placed in his hands, as a proof of Marlborough's treachery, the Brest letter itself.

Within a few hours of Gaultier's second attempt to murder Gwynett, Dorrington was kidnapped by a press-gang belonging to the *Mermaid*, while visiting the "Crown and Anchor" tavern at Deal in company with Gwynett. The circumstances of the capture enabled Gaultier, who witnessed it, to fasten upon Gwynett a charge of murdering Dorrington (of whose identity Gaultier was unaware). Gwynett was arrested, tried, and convicted of the supposed crime; but thanks to the assistance of captain Kermode and his half-brothers he escaped abroad, everyone excepting his rescuers believing him to be dead.

He made his way to his only surviving relative, a maternal uncle at Munich, the baron von Starhemberg, whose family name he had formerly assumed (at the request of M. de Torcy) while in France. Passing through Paris to Bavaria, he saved the life of the duc d'Orléans, the king's nephew, in a street riot—the duke being led by M. de Torcy (who was assured of Gwynett's death) to believe that his preserver was Randolph Dorrington.

* * * * *

The Paris disturbances arose out of the popular suspicion—carefully fostered by M. d'Orléans' enemies, madame de Maintenon, the duc du Maine (elder of Louis XIV.'s illegitimate sons), and their Jesuit *entourage*—that the duke had poisoned two of the direct heirs to the monarchy—*viz.*, the king's grandson the duc de Bourgogne (styled the "grand dauphin") and the latter's son (the "petit dauphin"), together with the duchesse de Bourgogne. All these had recently died within a few days of each other from some unknown disorder. The duke's

motive was asserted to be that of clearing the way for his daughter (wife of another of Louis XIV.'s grandsons, the duc de Berri) becoming queen of France, as the only intervening heir was now the duc de Bourgogne's second son, a feeble and sickly child of two years old.

With these fatalities in the French royal family (following closely on the death of the former dauphin, Louis XIV.'s only legitimate son) the duc d'Orléans had nothing whatever to do, and the solution of the mystery lay in the measureless ambition of a great court beauty, Gaultier's sister, the comtesse de Valincour. This personage's schemes for attaining political power (known only to her brother) required the advancement of the duc d'Orléans (at this period almost an exile from court) to the position either of regent or of king, he being now the next heir to the throne after the baby dauphin and his own son-in-law the duc de Berri.

The comtesse had been attached to the household of the duchesse de Bourgogne, and passed after her death to the household of the duchesse de Berri. But she had, so far, rejected the addresses of M. d'Orléans on the ground—as she allowed him to learn through his factotum and former tutor the abbé Dubois—of his being a “political nonentity,” and cherished a secret *penchant* for the chevalier de Starhemberg. This was the name, as has been said, under which Gwynett passed in Paris and Versailles, and the comtesse was aware of no other. But her brother the abbé Gaultier, on the contrary, knew nothing of Gwynett except under his real name, and was convinced, like the rest of the world, that he was dead.

* * * * *

Somewhat later than these events Gwynett returned to England in disguise, and revealed himself to his family lawyer, Mr. Wrottesley, from whom he learned that the Wray household was on a visit to some relatives settled in Virginia, that Noel Wray was missing, and the whereabouts of Muriel and her aunt Rostherne was unknown, while nothing had been heard of Mr. Dorrington or the *Mermaid*, the ship being absent on a long voyage. He therefore returned to Bavaria.

Just at this time the duke of Marlborough, suspecting that the compromising Brest letter had come into the

hands of his political enemy, the prime minister lord Oxford, fled from England (November 28th, 1712). His arrival at Antwerp was taken by the marquis de Torcy as a proof that the duke intended to break his promise, and to reassume command of the emperor of Germany's forces. Unaware of Mr. Dorrington's disappearance, the marquis despatched the Brest letter to that gentleman, as arranged, at Will's Coffee-house, with the intention of precipitating an encounter between him and the duke, and thereby riding France of her most dangerous antagonist. But the letter remained, of course, undelivered.

BOOK I

A DEAD MAN'S SHOES

Gwynett of Thornhaugh

BOOK I

A DEAD MAN'S SHOES

CHAPTER I.

A THREE YEARS' RETROSPECT.

IT was Monday, August 26th, 1715.

Since the flight of the duke of Marlborough from England on November 28th, 1712, a good many things had happened which concerned, directly or indirectly, the personages who are to reappear in this narrative.

The peace negotiations at Utrecht had come to a final close on April 11th, 1713, when nine different powers had signed treaties. But the emperor of Germany had held aloof, and it was not till September, 1714, that prince Eugène had signed with maréchal Villars the treaty of Rastadt, and thus terminated definitely the War of the Spanish Succession.

On May 4th, 1714, the duc de Berri died at Marly, M. Boulduc (the king's apothecary) and all the other doctors averring that the symptoms of his illness were identical with those noticed in the cases of the duc de Bourgogne and his wife. The duchesse de Berri, who had not yet borne any living children, was very much annoyed at losing her chance of a crown, and the grief of her *dame d'atours*, madame de Valincour, was understood to have been quite touching to witness.

On June 16th following, the duchesse was prematurely confined of a daughter, who died twelve hours later. The little dauphin, duc d'Anjou, great-grandson of Louis XIV., was now the sole survivor in France of the king's three generations of legitimate descendants, and the duc d'Orléans stood next to him in succession to the throne.

On July 29th, the princes of the blood and the peers of France were amazed and enraged by the news that Louis XIV. had formally legitimated his two sons by madame de Montespan, the duc du Maine and the comte de Toulouse, giving them precedence and rights of succession after the princes of the blood (MM. d'Orléans, de Bourbon-Condé, and de Conti).

A month later the president and the attorney-general of the parliament of Paris were summoned to Versailles to receive from the king a sealed packet containing his will. The parliament was forthwith assembled to be informed of this deposit, and to register his majesty's decree that this was his will, that it appointed a regency, and that immediately after his death it was to be opened and read before the princes of the blood, the peers, and the members of the parliament. The contents were kept secret; but people drew their own conclusions from a remark of the king's next day to the "queen of England," James II.'s widow. She had come from Chaillot to call upon Louis, and he said to her angrily, "They would absolutely have me do it; but as soon as I am dead, it will be just the same as if I had not done it."

In England, just at this time, matters had suddenly been turned upside down. Henry St. John, viscount Bolingbroke, had succeeded after three years of incessant intrigue in ousting his colleague lord Oxford from power and office. On Tuesday, July 27th, 1714, the lord-treasurer was dismissed by Anne, and Bolingbroke was installed in his stead. On the following Sunday the queen died. Before the Tories or the Jacobites could open their mouths, the Whigs proclaimed the elector of Hanover king, and formed a Council of Regency under the Act of 1705. In the evening of the same day the duke of Marlborough arrived in England from Ostend (whence he had sailed on hearing of the queen's impending decease), and received an enormous ovation on his way to London. Under a

Whig ministry and a new Whig parliament, lords Oxford, Bolingbroke, and Ormonde were impeached for treason in connection with the peace of Utrecht. Oxford was sent to the Tower, and his two colleagues fled to France and the service of the Pretender, the chevalier de St. George, in Lorraine.

In Spain the young queen Marie-Louise of Savoy was dead, Philippe V. had taken for his second wife Elizabeth of Parma, and the princesse des Ursins was an exile.

In Lorraine, the Pretender and his Jacobite *entourage* were busy planning an armed rising in Great Britain, to be assisted if possible either by the French government or by Charles XII. of Sweden. The former had, so far, declined to violate the treaty of Utrecht, and the reply of the latter had not yet been received.

At Versailles, Louis XIV. lay dying.

CHAPTER II.

THE SALON OF MADAME DE VALINCOUR.

ON the evening of August 26th, 1715, madame de Valincour held a reception at her hôtel in Paris.

The comtesse had lost her husband in the summer of the previous year, shortly after resigning her post in the de Berri household at Marly, but she was now out of mourning. Since coming to reside in Paris, she had been recognized as a shining light in the society of the capital. This was more or less in opposition to that of Versailles and represented partly the adherents of the duc d'Orléans, partly those who were disappointed or ignored under the existing *régime*, and partly those who detested madame de Maintenon, the "légitimés" (MM. du Maine and de Toulouse), and the Jesuit *entourage* of the king. In this society the comtesse was immensely popular. While her beauty, fresher and more dazzling than ever, was the constant theme of the men's admiration, she disarmed the hostility of the women by absolutely declining to rob them of their lovers. In fact, the insensibility of the fair relict of M. de Valincour was so marked as to be considered quite unbecoming. Even the duc d'Orléans, who had rarely to complain of any excessive rigidity on the part of his lady acquaintances, went about saying that the virtue of madame de Valincour was perfectly preposterous. Nevertheless, he attended her receptions with conspicuous regularity, and listened with an enigmatical smile when his friends assured him that if the comtesse was in love with anybody it was with his factotum and *âme damnée*, the abbé Dubios.

On this particular evening the three large salons of the hôtel Valincour were filled with Orléanists, and all the talk ran upon the impending regency. The king's dangerous illness, which had begun just a week before, had raised the fears and hopes of the two warring parties in

the political world to fever heat, and no report was too unlikely to secure at all events a moment's hearing. Although the contents of the will deposited with the parliament of Paris a year ago were still undivulged, it was perfectly certain that it had been drawn up under the Maintenon influence. It must therefore be either disadvantageous or perilous to the duc d'Orléans, whose technical right to the sole regency was otherwise indisputable. But on the previous night something had happened which seemed to suggest a more favorable outlook for the duke.

The king had received the sacrament from the hands of cardinal de Rohan and père Tellier his Jesuit confessor, and had signed some document prepared for him by the chancellor Voysin (successor to the comte de Ponchartrain). Then he had sent for the duc d'Orléans, who now had a suite of rooms at Versailles, and after some little conversation had told him emphatically that "he would find nothing in the will but what would please him." This piece of news had had the effect of rendering the duke's reception-room so crowded that, to quote the duc de St. Simon, there was not space for a pin to fall to the ground.

Amongst the guests who came to pay their compliments to madame de Valincour were several persons who may be already known to the reader. M. René de Lavalaye had brought his newly married wife, *née* Daguerre, and was accompanied by his worthy father-in-law, the governor of Calais. The duke of Berwick (Marlborough's nephew, and half-brother to the Pretender) had come with MM. de Simiane and de Canillac, and was talking to the duc de Noailles. The latter was full of the abominable conduct of cardinal de Rohan and père Tellier in preventing the king, in his dying moments, from according a reconciliatory interview to cardinal de Noailles, who had incurred madame de Maintenon's displeasure for his leadership of the anti-Jesuit party in the Gallican church.

"You must allow for a little spite, my dear M. de Noailles," remarked the comtesse, who was passing. "Do not they say that the king last Friday positively refused to accept père Tellier's nominees for the vacant bishoprics and benefices?"

"It is quite true," replied Berwick. "He said he had quite enough burdens on his conscience without incurring

any fresh ones—at least, that is the report. I think Fagon's assistant set it going, but Maréchal confirms it."

MM. Fagon and Maréchal were respectively the king's first physician and first surgeon.

"Fagon and Maréchal are at daggers drawn," said de Noailles. "It appears Maréchal has already told madame de Maintenon that in his opinion the king is being wrongly treated."

"Fagon is really insufferable," said Berwick. "But if Maréchal has any ground for what he says, it is excessively unfortunate—especially for the chevalier de St. George."

Here the duke caught sight of a tall man entering the opposite doorway. He immediately turned his back, and rambled off, looking very gloomy. As a matter of fact, the impending death of Louis XIV., if followed by an Orléans regency, promised to be a disaster of the first magnitude to the cause of the Pretender.

The newcomer just referred to—the earl of Stair—was a Whig partisan of the most extreme type, and had been lately residing in Paris as political agent for George I.'s government, ambassador in all but name, and a thorn in the side of the Jacobite refugees in France and Lorraine. His activity in unearthing the plans and movements of the Pretender's adherents was a source of infinite worry to the foreign secretary, M. de Torcy, to whom he every day complained of some violation of obligations of asylum by the chevalier de St. George; while Bolingbroke, who now acted as secretary of state to the chevalier, was continually puzzled to imagine where the earl got his information.

Behind lord Stair was the duc d'Orléans, who came forward to meet the comtesse as she crossed the room.

"Madame," said the duke, with *empressement*, "permit me to make known to you milord Stair, who has asked for the honor of an introduction. I have told him that as a politician you are a furious Jacobite, and as a woman the most cruel of your sex."

Lord Stair and the comtesse exchanged profound salutations.

"If that is the case, madame," said the earl, "it is lucky for king George that there is only one comtesse de Valincour."

"M. le duc gives me a character which, somehow, I fail to recognize," said the comtesse, with a smile that ravished the heart of the ambassador. "I think he is annoyed that you in England did not offer the crown to him instead of to king George."

"That had not occurred to me before," said the duke. "But, now that you mention it, I certainly find it a grievance. As M. le chevalier de St. George—with whom M. de Stair is dissatisfied—and myself are both great-grandsons of Henri Quatre, I decidedly think the English might have given me the refusal, if it was only to annoy those people at Versailles—instead of going round by way of Hanover and Bohemia to find a claimant. You may consider you have lost a dukedom by this oversight on the part of your government, monsieur."

The earl attended with his ears to the duke, and with eyes of unbounded admiration to the comtesse.

"As that honor would unfortunately have deprived me of the privilege of presenting myself to-night to madame la comtesse," he replied, "I only regret the existing arrangements on M. le duc's account."

"That is very good of you, milord," said d'Orléans. "If I do not find myself in the Bastille before the week is out, we must really see about that dukedom for you—on one side of the Channel or the other."

Lord Stair, whose peerage was hardly a dozen years old, bowed with a good deal of gratification, and reflected inwardly that they did not by any means say such pleasant things to him at Versailles. The duke gave a meaning glance over the earl's shoulder to madame de Valincour, who nodded imperceptibly, and said,

"I should like to introduce M. de Stair to a lady who has been his next-door neighbor ever since she was born—madame René de Lavalaye, by the window yonder."

"I think I have met M. de Lavalaye at M. de Torcy's."

"His wife lived in sight of England till her marriage. Her father, sitting next to her, is the governor of Calais. Come with me."

The comtesse crossed the room with lord Stair to the place where madame de Lavalaye, looking very plump and pretty, was sitting with M. Daguerre. The duke followed negligently, watched the ceremony of introduction, and

placed himself within reach of the comtesse as she turned away.

"I think I will return to Versailles now, comtesse," he said, adding in a tone inaudible to those around,

"Dubois is waiting to see you."

The comtesse swept a farewell curtsy, and replied in the same tone,

"As soon as I am free."

"Still inexorable, comtesse?" whispered the duke.

"Let us see first about the Bastille, M. le duc, as you remarked just now," replied the comtesse.

The duke smiled serenely, bowed again, and went off with M. de Simiane.

When the comtesse saw that all her expected guests had arrived, and were so immersed in gossip that her temporary absence would pass unnoticed, she left the salon and made her way to a little cabinet in a distant part of the house. Here the abbé Dubois was seated before a table and desk, busy with a bundle of foreign letters.

"Pardon my keeping you waiting, abbé," she said. "I could not slip away before. Have you any news?"

"Did the duke tell you anything?"

"No."

"Then I have some news."

"Let us hear it."

"At dinner to-day—or what passes for dinner, for he ate nothing—the king said to several of the *entrées** around his bed, 'Follow the orders my nephew will give you. He is to govern the kingdom; I hope he will govern it well.'"

"That confirms what he told M. le duc yesterday."

"Yes—as far as that goes."

"Does it not go far enough?"

"I am afraid not. He said this to-day just after he had received cardinals de Rohan and de Bissy."

"What of that?"

"He made his remark to M. d'Orléans yesterday—about the will—just after he had received de Rohan and père Tellier."

"And after receiving the sacrament also."

* Courtiers who had the right of waiting upon the king in his bedroom.

"That is the worst part of the affair."

The comtesse, who was extremely devout, looked very much shocked.

"M. l'abbé," she said, "at such a juncture his majesty would surely be speaking the simple truth."

"Unless he wanted to lie more impressively than usual," replied the abbé.

"Abbé, you are incorrigible."

"Madame, guess what the king was doing with M. Voysin yesterday, just after taking the sacrament, and just before seeing M. d'Orléans."

"Tell me."

"He was signing a codicil to his will, placing the liberty and life of M. d'Orléans, and of everybody else, at the absolute mercy of M. du Maine."

"Impossible!"

"There is no doubt of the matter."

"How did you come to know of it?"

"To-day M. Voysin himself came in fear and trembling to the duke, and told him of it in confidence. M. Voysin is not heroic, you will observe, and wants a soft place to fall on, if by any chance the Maintenon plot miscarries. She made him draw up the codicil and brought him to the king with it."

"Really, these people are atrocious. What are the actual provisions of the codicil?"

"Briefly, the civil and military household of the new king, including all the troops which may be at any time in or around Paris and Versailles, are to be the sole affair of M. du Maine. Maréchal Villeroi, who is to be in nominal command of the troops, will also be charged, under M. du Maine, with the personal care and education of the king."

"But that is absolute dictatorship!" cried the comtesse.

"I said as much just now."

"It puts the duke in a frightful position. What does he say about it?"

"Madame," replied the abbé savagely, "one might as well ask a two months' baby its ideas about the other side of the moon. All one can get out of him is, 'My good Dubois, there is absolutely nothing to make a fuss about!'"

"Does that mean that he has a plan?"

"Not he. And he will listen to nothing from anyone

else. There was a sort of council of war at the Palais-Royal just before he came here to your reception—MM. de St. Simon, de Canillac, d'Argenson, major Contades of the Guards, and lieutenant Mirepoix of the Black Musketeers. All were unanimous in urging M. d'Orléans to protect himself without an instant's delay, by summoning the household troops to the Palais-Royal, placing himself at their head, and assuming the regency at the moment of the king's death, under the fundamental laws of the monarchy."

"Could the regiments be depended on?"

"Contades answered for the duc de Charost and his Guards, who are all noble and hate the *légitimés* like poison. The Musketeers have a few *protégés* of madame de Maintenon amongst them, but the king once dead they would be practically solid for the duke."

"And his answer?"

"*Sangdieu!* always the same—'Gentlemen, don't worry yourselves. You may accept my assurance that there will be no occasion whatever for your very obliging proposals.' What is one to do with a man like that?"

The abbé got up and walked restlessly about the room, while the comtesse knitted her brows and stared at the desk before her.

"Has madame de Ventadour any news?" she asked. "I have not seen her for a couple of days."

"Nothing of consequence. She took in the dauphin to see the king this afternoon. De Tresmes made a terrible slip in announcing them, spoke of the 'little king,' and nearly boggled himself into a fit trying to cover it. But the king only said, 'Why not?—why not?—' That was all."

The comtesse cogitated for some moments in silence, while the abbé seated himself again, and made some calculations on a piece of paper. Then madame de Valincour looked up and asked,

"Have you anything to propose, abbé?"

"Nothing—unless you can fascinate M. de Bernaville at the Bastille. That will serve for the early stages; afterwards it may be a question of doing the amiable to M. Charles Sanson de Longval."

"Who is he?"

"Our worthy executioner to the city of Paris."

The comtesse made a little gesture of horrified disgust.

"You do not think they are ready to go as far as that?" she asked.

"If M. du Maine is not ready, both la Scarron and père Tellier are. Unfortunately, that triple idiot St. Simon has set the peers and the parliament by the ears, with his preposterous fuss about the hat question, and the legal members may go with the Maine party just to spite St. Simon. But of course the peers and the princes of the blood will support M. d'Orléans. M. du Maine seems to realize that acutely, judging from what he said the other day."

"What was that?"

"I apologize beforehand for his style, which certainly lacks elegance. Madame de Berri told him the princes had just as great an objection to ranking before him as the peers had to ranking behind him. He replied, 'Yes; I am like a louse between two thumb-nails.'"

"There is a modest candor about that which is rather pleasing."

"One can afford a good deal of modest candor if one is going to be regent and dictator. Unfortunately, madame, if the thumb-nails are as easily pleased as you are, the louse will have me broken on the wheel one of these fine mornings, for some excellent reason or another."

"If things come to the worst, abbé, I will keep you out of sight in my cellar—till we can both go to Bar-le-duc."

Bar-le-duc was a small town in Lorraine, which had been for some time past the headquarters of the Pretender. The abbé looked up sharply at the mention of the name.

"Bar-le-duc, madame? You do not expect that egg ever to be hatched, surely?"

"Why not?"

"They can do nothing unaided. And the king has absolutely refused both money and men, although he would not object to furnishing arms and a ship or two, on the quiet. M. d'Orléans will refuse everything, if by any chance he gets the regency; on what else have we been insisting the last two years?"

"It is not a question of the king, or of M. d'Orléans; it is a question of M. du Maine. It is perfectly certain that the Maintenon party will go as far as they dare to further

a Catholic restoration in Great Britain, if the regency comes into their hands."

"That is possible, I admit."

"Evidently, then, abbé, whenever the door is shut against us at the Palais-Royal, it is opened to us at Bar-le-duc."

"To you, madame, if you like—since you happen to be at once a beautiful woman and a *dévôt*. But the kind of door they will open for me, whom they style a pagan, is a little door which opens downwards and is called a drop, and which I should find very disagreeable."

"Your modesty is quite touching, abbé. Let me assure you that an army of pagans would be received with open arms at Bar-le-duc, if they were ready to install the few necessary Christians at St. James's."

The abbé shrugged his shoulders.

"Madame, you cannot help folks who will not help themselves. These people have no backbone. Take lord Ormonde. Nothing was more distinctly understood than that the moment his liberty was threatened under the impeachment, he was to hasten to the west of England and organize a strong rising among the numerous Jacobites of those counties. What happens? He hears a report that a corporal's guard is coming to his house at Richmond, and behold! he straightway turns up in Paris, a useless fugitive instead of an insurrectionary leader."

"All the better for us. But go on."

"Then M. de Berwick, ever since they bungled the succession in England so deplorably, has done nothing but protest to the English Jacobites that it is useless for the chevalier to make a move unless a strong body in England is actually ready to take the field, because Scotland is too weak to be relied on for an invading force."

"He is quite right, as matters stand. But I think they have special reasons for expecting assistance, French or English, under a regency."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because they have made a move—or rather, the chevalier has."

"I shall believe that when I see it, madame."

The comtesse opened the desk in front of her, unlocked a drawer, and took out a letter.

"I received this to-day," she said, handing it to the abbé. "Perhaps it may assist your faith a little."

Dubois opened the letter, which was from the abbé Gaultier, and read:

"CHATEAU OF BAR-LE-DUC.

"August 23rd, 1715.

"MY DEAR YVONNE:

"I told you in my last that father Calaghan had arrived from London with a message from lord Ormonde, proposing an immediate descent on the south coast, and recommending the chevalier to set out at once for Havre. Since then, lord Bolingbroke laid Ormonde's proposal before M. de Torcy, and it appears that the king, after consulting with the duke of Berwick, opposed the scheme as too hazardous.

"M. de Berwick then applied for help to the king of Sweden, suggesting that the eight thousand troops assembled at Gothenburg should be sent to England in transports from Strahlsund—a matter of forty-eight hours only. The king of France was willing, if Charles XII. agreed, to pay up the arrears of subsidies due to Sweden, and the chevalier was to pay 50,000 crowns towards the costs of the expedition.

"Yesterday we received the king of Sweden's reply, declining the proposal, as he is himself besieged both by land and sea at Strahlsund, and cannot further weaken his forces.

"However, the king of Spain has promised us 400,000 crowns, and the first 100,000 of these are now at sea on their way to Scotland. We have also four ships and 10,000 stand of arms hidden at Havre.

"The chevalier is very much disappointed and annoyed at lord Ormonde's unexpected flight from England, and fears that this makes it useless to think of a direct descent upon the south coast. He has therefore decided definitely to try Scotland, and has this day written to lord Mar to leave London for the Firth of Forth at once with lieutenant-general Hamilton, and raise the royal standard at Braemar.

"This step has been kept absolutely secret from everybody, even MM. Bolingbroke and de Berwick, and I owe the information to the fact that mistress Fanny Oglethorpe

was not at hand to-night, as usual, to prevent the chevalier from getting drunk. Be, therefore, very discreet about this.

ARMAND GAULTIER."

The abbé Dubois read this letter very carefully, and returned it to the comtesse.

"That is extremely important," he remarked seriously. "Permit me to observe that your brother seems to have managed matters very well there."

"I think so. One thing seems quite clear—that the Jacobites have no real leader."

"Hence our own utility, you imagine?"

"I presume you would not object to be secretary of state in England, abbé?"

"It would be curious, if, for the first time, there was a queen Yvonne over there, would it not, comtesse?"

The comtesse rose, with a slight smile on her lips.

"*A propos*," she said, "do you know anything of this Oglethorpe?"

"I have seen her. A good sort of soul. You need not trouble yourself about her."

"Then it is quite understood, abbé——?"

"Quite, comtesse. If the duke weathers the storm, we are allies in Paris. If he goes under, we are allies—wherever a crown is to be picked up."

"Adieu, abbé."

"Adieu, your majesty of some day or other."

The abbé opened a side-door leading out of the cabinet, nodded, and disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

THE SETTING OF THE SUN.

THE following day the king was found to be much worse. The gangrene of his foot and knee had spread, and the doctors confessed themselves at the end of their resources. Dr. Fagon, the chief physician to the king, was, if possible, more irritable and brutal than ever; and the courtiers continued to infer from this that they must on no account neglect to be seen at the duc d'Orléans' rooms as much as possible.

On the Wednesday morning the king was no better, and it was mentioned that he could eat nothing. This news spread instantly among the courtiers, who thronged the great Galerie des Miroirs even at an early hour.

The king's bedroom adjoined this gallery. In an antechamber on one side of the bedroom were the pharmacists, who prepared and warmed what was ordered by the medical men, together with the royal valets who were not actually engaged with the king. Between the bedroom and the gallery were the cabinets with glass doors in which waited the princes of the blood, the king's daughters (the princesse de Conti and the duchesses d'Orléans and de Bourbon-Condé, children of Louise de la Vallière and madame de Montespan), the ministers, the secretaries of state, and the *entrées*. The inner room, called the cabinet du conseil, was used only by the duc d'Orléans, maréchal Villars, the chancellor, père Tellier, and the curé of Versailles.

About nine o'clock in the morning M. d'Orléans appeared on one of his studiously regulated visits; that is to say, he was ushered by the duc de Tresmes, first gentleman of the bedchamber, to the doorway between the cabinet du conseil and the bedroom, where the king could see him as he lay in bed. On this occasion his majesty merely acknowledged his salutation and made no remark. Shortly

afterwards the duchesse d'Orléans and her daughter, the duchesse de Berri, saw the king for the first time for several days. Then Dr. Fagon roughly intimated that the king's strength must not be taxed any further.

An hour later M. Maréchal, the king's chief surgeon, entered the salon of the duc d'Orléans, and asked to speak with him. The duke took him aside, and inquired what was the matter.

"M. le duc," said the surgeon, "we want your good offices with M. Fagon. A rather curious thing has happened."

"What! has he been decently civil to somebody?" asked the duke.

"M. le duc, a man has just come to the palace who professes to be able to cure the king, or at least to effect a considerable improvement."

"Who is he?"

"He calls himself Lebrun."

"A physician?"

"Not at all. He seems to be a peasant, and is on his way from Marseilles to Paris. But he claims to have an elixir, with which he has made wonderful cures, and he insists on the king giving it a trial. It appears he has heard that the doctors can do nothing more than they have done. I should like you to see him. There is no doubt he is quite serious."

"By all means," said the duke.

He put on his hat and went out with the surgeon. Ten minutes later the pair entered the great gallery, bringing with them a person upon whom the eyes of the courtiers were immediately fixed in amazement. He was a white-haired but vigorous-looking man of middle height, with broad shoulders, bull head, and Herculean limbs, and was dressed as a farm-laborer of the South. His massive and well-cut Provençal features expressed a good deal of quiet self-reliance, and he looked round upon the glittering throng with entire nonchalance of manner.

The three went forward into the ante-chamber where the pharmacists had their stove and dispensing apparatus, and where M. Pernault, the usher of the ante-chamber, was at the moment waiting for the dressings for the king's foot. Here also was M. de Tresmes, and to him the duc d'Orléans

whispered a few words, at which M. de Tresmes looked immeasurably astonished.

"M. Fagon will never listen to it," he said.

"Where is M. Fagon just now?"

"He has gone away for a few minutes."

"All the better," said the duke. "Now is your opportunity."

"But what can one do, M. le duc?"

"That is your affair, my dear M. de Tresmes. If you choose to assume the responsibility of doing nothing, the blame will, at all events, not rest with me."

"But it is unheard-of," murmured de Tresmes.

The duke shrugged his shoulders.

"I should have imagined that his majesty was entitled to a voice in the matter," he said.

"Then you advise me to inform the king?"

"I? Not at all. I never advise anybody. Only, if this worthy fellow is not wanted here, let us send him away. It will be interesting to hear what story he will tell about us all outside."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated de Tresmes uneasily.

"I told him I should leave the affair in your hands," explained the duke pleasantly; "otherwise, you see, the good people in Paris might fancy it was I who wished to prevent his majesty from recovering."

This remark put an end to M. de Tresmes' hesitation.

"I will tell the king at once," he said. "But you must explain to M. Fagon—he may be back any moment."

"Pooh!" replied the duke. "M. Fagon will not try to eat me. He knows I should disagree with him."

The first gentleman disappeared into the bedroom, and there was a pause of a minute or two, during which the attendants looked at the peasant with curiosity. M. Pernault received from the chief pharmacist a fresh set of dressings, and followed de Tresmes into the bedroom.

A moment later M. de Tresmes returned, and whispered in the ear of M. d'Orléans,

"His majesty wishes to see him."

The duke went up to the peasant, and said,

"My good friend, follow this gentleman; he will take you to the king."

The peasant made a salute which was not without a cer-

tain dignity, and walked after de Tresmes into the bedroom, the door of which closed behind them. Seeing the king lying in bed, the peasant knelt down, and clasped his hands over his heart.

"Get up, my friend," said the king, in a feeble voice. "What have you to say to me? Come a little nearer."

The peasant rose, and approached the bedside.

"Sire," he said, "I have a very good medicine, which has cured many people in my country, and I came to offer it to your majesty."

"What is your country, my friend?"

"I am from Marseilles, your majesty."

"And your name?"

"Lebrun, your majesty."

The king looked at Lebrun thoughtfully for a moment or two, and then turned to Pernault, who stood waiting at the other side of the bed.

"Go on, M. Pernault," said the king; "and M. Lebrun can judge for himself."

Pernault turned back the bedclothes, and uncovered the king's foot to dress it. The limb was gangrened from the ankle to above the knee, and violently inflamed. Lebrun stooped over, and examined the affected part with a serious countenance.

"I am afraid I am beyond your skill, M. Lebrun," said the king, with a good-natured smile.

"That leg looks bad, certainly," replied Lebrun, without any ceremony. "But I have seen as bad. Unfortunately, your majesty is no chicken."

Pernault nearly dropped his bandage at this remark. But the king only smiled again.

"That is true," he said. "If I live another week, I shall be seventy-seven."

"I am eighty," replied Lebrun simply.

"Evidently you may live to see my little great-grandson married," said the king. "But if you had been a king ever since you were five years old, my friend, I doubt whether you would have managed quite so well."

The peasant made no reply, but watched in silence while Pernault applied the bandages.

"Well, M. Lebrun, what can you do for me?" asked Louis, after a pause.

"I beg your majesty to take a dose or two of my medicine," replied Lebrun, taking a little bottle out of the breast-pocket of his blouse. "Certainly your majesty is very ill; but I have known it do wonders with people as bad or worse."

The king nodded, and made a sign to Pernault.

"My friend," he said to Lebrun, "I thank you for your goodwill, and the trouble you have taken for me. Go with this gentleman to the pharmacists in the ante-room, and explain to them what is to be done."

"God bless and restore your majesty!" said the peasant, kneeling by the bedside.

The king put his hand on the peasant's head for a moment, instead of giving it to him to kiss.

"Adieu, my good friend," he said gently.

The peasant seized the king's hand, kissed it hastily, and went out in silence with Pernault. As soon as he was in the ante-chamber, and the door of the king's room closed behind him, he said to the assistants, who were looking at him open-mouthed,

"Which of you is the apothecary?"

The principal pharmacist came forward, and asked if he could be of service.

"Give me some Alicante wine," said Lebrun.

An assistant handed him a flask, and he poured a large spoonful of wine into a silver ladle, which he took from the plate-basket lying at hand. This he heated over a flame of alcohol kept burning on the dresser, and as soon as it began to steam he poured into the ladle ten drops of a thick liquid from his little bottle. After mixing the elixir thoroughly with the contents of the ladle, he asked for a cup half full of wine, and poured the hot wine into the cold.

At this moment the outer door of the ante-chamber was flung violently open, and an under-sized man, with a very red face and a bullying expression of countenance, bounced into the room. This was Dr. Fagon, chief physician to the king.

"Where is this infernal quack?" he asked angrily, not noticing Lebrun, who had his back to the door.

The duc d'Orléans came forward and placed himself between the doctor and the peasant.

"Hush! my dear M. Fagon," he said suavely. "Your

new colleague is present. Permit me to introduce you to M. Lebrun, who seems to have impressed his majesty very favorably."

Fagon glared suspiciously from the duke to the assistants, and then caught sight of Lebrun, who had just finished mixing his dose.

"What is all this nonsense?" he snarled to the chief pharmacist, as he snatched up the empty ladle, sniffed it contemptuously, and jerked his head towards the peasant.

The pharmacist judiciously held his peace, and the doctor turned to Lebrun.

"We are not to be fooled here with your filthy rubbish, monsieur," he said brutally.

The peasant took no notice of the doctor, but put the cup of medicated wine upon the dresser. Fagon turned purple in the face, and shook the peasant roughly by the arm.

"Do you hear, monsieur?" he growled. "This is not a place for clowns to sell poison in."

Lebrun made a slight movement of his arm, without taking the trouble to turn round. The doctor was sent reeling across the room till his foot caught against a chair, and he fell in a heap under a table. Maréchal went to pick him up, with an obtrusive excess of politeness, and the assistants turned their backs to conceal their chuckles.

Lebrun meanwhile handed the chief pharmacist his bottle, and said,

"Let the king take that cupful of wine now. Three times a day mix a dose of ten drops, as you saw me do, in the same wine."

The pharmacist took the bottle, and Lebrun knelt down, facing the king's door. He crossed himself and muttered some words of a prayer, watched by the wondering bystanders. Then he rose, picked up his hat, bowed to the duc d'Orléans, and went towards the outer door.

On his way he was intercepted by Fagon, now more furious than ever.

"You miserable scoundrel!" roared the doctor, "I will have you flogged at the cart's tail. Do you know whom you have assaulted?"

Lebrun looked at him with an impassive face.

"No," he replied.



F.W. Hughes

"I am his majesty's chief physician," said Fagon, straddling in front of the peasant with a bullying air.

"Ah!" remarked Lebrun seriously. "No wonder the poor king is dying."

He put forth his arm, brushed Fagon out of the way as if he had been a fly, and disappeared through the doorway into the gallery. Maréchal followed, to escort him out of the palace, and the strange visitor departed, to be seen no more.

It was now eleven o'clock. The king took Lebrun's mixture, despite the splenetic remonstrances of Fagon, and felt better. In the afternoon he became worse again, and the dose was repeated at four o'clock.

About this time madame de Maintenon came into the king's room to make one of her routine visits. These had considerably diminished in frequency since matters in church and state had been finally settled to her satisfaction by the repulse of cardinal de Noailles and the signing of the codicil, and she now took very little pains to conceal the fact that she found the king's dilatoriness in dying to be rather a nuisance. Lebrun's visit was spoken of, but the king remarked that he saw himself no chance of recovery.

"Sire, it is our duty never to abandon hope," said the marquise in reply.

"In my condition," said the king, "to hope would be wilfully to deceive myself. But when I think of our inevitable parting, marquise, I am consoled by the reflection that it cannot be for very long. At our age, we must soon again be reunited."

The marquise, although older than the king,* had no intention of dying for a good while yet, and found his philosophy in very bad taste. She terminated the conversation in high dudgeon, and went away from Versailles to await the news of the king's death in her institution for young noblewomen at St. Cyr.

The next morning the king was reported to be a little better. This news reached the rooms of the duc d'Orléans as the customary crowds of courtiers were collecting to pay their respects to the duke. It produced a good deal of un-

* Françoise d'Aubigny was born November 27, 1635, in the gaol of Niort, where her father had been imprisoned for debt.

easiness, and a decided tendency was shown to hang about the doorways, through which retreat, if called for, would be easy.

At ten o'clock, when the duke usually put in an appearance, a rumor was suddenly circulated amongst the groups in his salons. Whispers, first of incredulity, and then of alarm, were heard on all sides, and the rooms thinned rapidly. A second report was bruited around, a regular stampede followed, and the courtiers nearly fell over each other in their haste to escape from the compromising precincts.

As the last retreating coat-tails fluttered around the *portières* of the doorways, the duke, attended by his first gentleman of the bedchamber, M. de Conflans, entered from his private room, and looked around the deserted salon with a sardonic smile.

"Evidently we are not the only ones to hear the news, my dear de Conflans," he remarked, seating himself in an easy-chair by the window. "Ah, here is St. Simon."

The duc de St. Simon entered as he spoke, and looked round him in amazement.

"Good morning, M. le duc," he said, as he came forward. "What on earth has happened? Where is everybody?"

"Have you not heard the news?" asked the duke.

"What news?"

"It appears the king is doing finely. He has eaten two little biscuits, steeped in wine, with quite an appetite."

"Really?"

"Hence our present solitude. It is quite evident that if his majesty makes a decent lunch, I shall have to black my own boots."

St. Simon turned to de Conflans inquiringly.

"It is perfectly true, M. le duc," replied de Conflans.

St. Simon made a face of disgust, and helped himself to snuff.

"What a crew!" he muttered, under his breath.

"Between ourselves," remarked the duke, "I think our friends alarm themselves needlessly. The rats are usually pretty safe guides."

"What do you mean, M. le duc?"

"Has not the marquise retired to St. Cyr?"

"That is true. They must be very confident amongst themselves, M. le duc?"

"Good Lord! let them be confident, if it amuses them. It costs nothing, which cannot be said of all amusements."

St. Simon looked as if he by no means shared the duke's optimism, but he did not see his way to disturb it. Eventually he went off to pick up the latest gossip, while the duke made his way to the rooms of madame de Ventadour and the little dauphin, in the hope of finding the comtesse de Valincour there.

In the afternoon the duke went to pay his daily visit to the king in his bedroom. Passing through the great gallery, he found M. du Maine hilariously describing the Lebrun episode for the benefit of two or three of the courtiers, who had only just arrived from his house at Sceaux, and had thus missed Dr. Fagon's discomfiture. Immense amusement accompanied the story, and this became more noisy and unrestrained as it proceeded. The sound of M. du Maine's voice penetrated into the bedroom when the door was opened to admit the duc d'Orléans, and the king looked up with a disturbed expression. At that moment the outer door of the cabinet du conseil happened to be also opened, and a yell of laughter from the duc du Maine in the gallery echoed through the intervening rooms. The king's ashen face flushed angrily.

"Who is it that finds things so amusing here?" he asked, with more vigor than he had displayed for a week previously.

The duke maintained a nonchalant silence, and père Tellier, who was standing at the other side of the bed, looked very uncomfortable.

"I believe I asked a question," said the king, with a flash of his old hauteur, and turning his head towards père Tellier.

"I did not recognize the voice, sire," replied the confessor circumspectly.

"Was it not M. du Maine?" asked the king querulously.

Père Tellier hesitated for a moment, and then, catching the contemptuous stare of the duke fixed upon him, replied with some little confusion,

"Possibly you are right, sire."

The king's head fell upon his breast, and he seemed deeply hurt at the incident. Then he asked, after a pause,

"Where is the marquise?"

Again the duke kept silence, and again the confessor was at a nonplus.

"Am I to ask every question twice?" demanded the king, with a trembling voice.

"I will inquire, your majesty," replied the confessor hurriedly, and making a move to leave the room.

"I do not think that is necessary, mon père," put in the duke, who did not feel disposed to let the confessor escape. "If madame la marquise had returned from St. Cyr, she would no doubt have let you know."

"St. Cyr!" ejaculated the king, with pained surprise.

"Père Tellier has then omitted to tell your majesty that madame la marquise took her departure yesterday?" asked the duke remorselessly.

The king's flush died away, and he became paler than before. He looked unutterable things at the confessor, and sank back with closed eyes upon his pillow. A minute's silence followed, and then he said, in almost inaudible tones,

"Leave me, mon père, and let the marquise be sent for."

The confessor was glad to make his escape; and the duke, after summoning the king's valet, M. Bloin, retired silently by way of the cabinet du conseil.

In the gallery the duc du Maine was wiping from his eyes the tears caused by the excess of his laughter at the reminiscence of Dr. Fagon and Lebrun, and most of the courtiers around were following his example. The duke bowed pleasantly to M. du Maine.

"His majesty was good enough to inquire after madame la marquise just now," he said, in passing.

"Ah!" said du Maine, with cheerful *insouciance*, and eyeing the duke with a triumphant smile, "I suppose that is not of very much consequence."

"I suppose not," replied the duke negligently. "The marquise might have been interested in this question of a new codicil, perhaps. But that is not my affair, of course. I have the honor to——"

M. du Maine interrupted the duke in a paroxysm of sudden terror.

"Good heavens! M. le duc," he asked, with his knees shaking, "what are you saying? A new codicil?"

"*Parbleu!* have you not heard of it?" said the duke, disengaging himself, and passing onward.

Du Maine fell on a couch speechless, and a whisper ran round amongst the courtiers. St. Simon, who had come up in time to hear the last few sentences, followed the duke out of the gallery.

"Is that really true, M. le duc?" he asked eagerly, as soon as they were out of hearing.

"What?"

"About a new codicil?"

"Not in the least," replied the duke. "But it is amusing to scare *ces misérables*."

"Ah!" said St. Simon, rather disappointed.

Madame de Maintenon, having learnt of the king's inquiry after her, came back to Versailles during the evening of this day, Thursday, August 29th. But the following evening, the king having become delirious, she took her departure a second time (after having distributed her furniture amongst her domestics), and retired finally to St. Cyr.

On the ensuing day the king was unconscious, the gangrene spread rapidly, and the prayers for the dying were recited.

The next morning, at half-past seven o'clock, the little dauphin, with madame de Ventadour, the princes of the blood (MM. d'Orléans, de Bourbon-Condé, and de Conti), the duchesse d'Orléans, the princesse de Conti, M. du Maine and his children, and M. de Toulouse were summoned by Fagon to the king's room, and the doors were closed upon them. A great crowd of courtiers collected in the Galerie des Miroirs, near the door of the cabinet du conseil, and an unwonted silence reigned through the vast palace.

At a quarter to eight M. de Tresmes passed through the cabinet, opened the glass door of the gallery, and announced in sonorous tones to the expectant throng,

"*Le roi est mort! Vive le roi!*"

So Louis XIV. died, and the little duc d'Anjou, Louis XV., reigned in his stead.

CHAPTER IV.

A REMARKABLE PROPHECY.

A FEW minutes after the king's death had been announced by M. de Tresmes, the duc d'Orléans came out of the bedroom, and passed through the cabinet du conseil into the gallery. He met with a very guarded reception from the courtiers, amongst whom the codicil to the king's will had in some way got wind, and who bowed to him with one eye on the look-out for the duc du Maine. The duke noticed that no one seemed disposed to follow him to his rooms, where MM. de Simiane, de Canillac, and d'Argenson (lieutenant-general of police) were already in waiting. But he had scarcely passed out of the gallery when a footstep behind him made him turn round, and he found himself confronted by the duc de Charost, captain of the king's Guards.

"Ah! M. de Charost," said the duke cheerfully, "you wish to speak to me?"

"For a moment, M. le duc."

"I am quite at your service."

"M. le duc——" and the captain hesitated for a moment.

"Pooh! no ceremony, my dear duke. M. du Maine has sent you to arrest me, I suppose?"

"Not at all, monsieur. On the contrary——"

"Well?"

M. de Charost looked cautiously round, and came close up to the duke.

"I have come, M. le duc," he whispered, "to ask if you would like me to arrest M. du Maine."

The duke burst out laughing.

"I? Good Lord! no," he replied. "It is very good of you, my dear fellow. But why will you all persist in trying to make me look ridiculous?"

"Permit me to say, M. le duc, that I think you underrate the danger of your position."

"Would it make you more comfortable to feel assured there was no danger at all?"

"Much more comfortable, M. le duc."

"I will make you as comfortable as you like in two minutes, if you will come with me."

"I shall have great pleasure," replied de Charost, looking rather puzzled, and following the duke into his salon.

In this room the three gentlemen before mentioned were listening to the duc de St. Simon, who had come in by another door, and was dilating upon some subject which seemed to be of the deepest interest to him.

"Ah!" he said excitedly, as the duke entered, "now, now, M. le duc, we shall have the affair of *le bonnet* settled at last, I hope."

This question of "*le bonnet*" was an old-standing bone of contention between St. Simon and certain ultra-punctilious peers on the one hand, and the "noblesse of the robe" on the other—the peers insisting on the right of giving their votes in the parliament of Paris with their hats on, while the legal members contested the invidious privilege. Louis XIV. had shirked settling the difficulty, except in so far as he had decided that when the king himself was present the peers should enjoy their ordinary right to remain covered. This compromise had satisfied nobody, and St. Simon had always busied himself at the head of the malcontent dukes. Now that a new order of things was about to begin, this profound statesman naturally jumped at the point which, as regards the affairs of the monarchy, appeared to him of the supremest importance.

"Ah! *le bonnet*," repeated M. d'Orléans blandly. "Certainly something must be done about that. But it is a little early yet, my dear St. Simon."

"M. le duc, now is the hour to strike a decisive blow. If this opportunity is lost, when can we expect a better one?"

"Probably you are right," replied the duke. "Have you obtained M. du Maine's promise of support, may I ask?"

St. Simon stared at the duke uncomprehendingly.

"M. du Maine?" he echoed. "Of what can you be thinking, M. le duc?"

"Well, my dear friend, it is quite obvious that no one but the king can settle this affair to your satisfaction. There-

fore you must secure the person who can secure the king—the regent, that is to say.”

“M. du Maine regent!”

“I think you will have no difficulty in getting him appointed regent—if you insist on it.”

St. Simon looked from the duke to the others as if a little doubtful about the former’s sanity.

“Really, M. le duc,” he said at length, “I confess I do not understand you.”

“What is the difficulty?” asked the duke. “Is not M. du Maine understood to be designated for the regency by this codicil they talk about, and most probably by the will also?”

“Without doubt.”

“And to what authority can we look to upset this arrangement?”

“To begin with,” replied St. Simon promptly, “we must get the parliament of Paris on our side.”

“Precisely. And you come to propose that I should make mortal enemies of two-thirds of the members. M. du Maine ought to be enormously obliged to you.”

St. Simon was quite silenced by this view of the case, and looked so crestfallen that the duke could hardly help laughing.

“My dear fellow,” he went on, “you must really have a little mercy on us. It will be time to talk about hats on our heads when we have no longer a rope round our necks.”

De Canillac looked unutterable reproaches at St. Simon.

“It is imperative that the parliament should be kept in the best possible humor,” he said.

“To re-open the quarrel at this juncture would, in my opinion, be fatal,” added d’Argenson. “What do you think, M. de Charost?”

“I don’t think—I know,” replied the captain of the Guards curtly. “Let us shout when we are out of the wood, if we are to shout at all.”

The duke offered his snuff-box to St. Simon, and remarked, in a considerate tone,

“I think, my dear friend, you have nothing to lose by waiting. Let the matter rest for a week.”

“A week, M. le duc?”

"Yes; that will give time for the king to attend at the registration of the vote which will be arrived at in the parliament to-morrow, appointing me sole regent."

"What! M. le duc!"

"Will not that satisfy you?"

"Then, M. le duc," broke in de Charost eagerly, "you agree to our taking active steps?"

"What steps?" asked the duke.

"To assemble the Guards, the Musketeers, and the garrison at once, and proclaim you regent under the laws of the kingdom?"

"And then——?"

"Then you will take possession of the government and the person of the little king, and all will be settled."

The duke offered his snuff-box to the others.

"That seems a good notion of Charost's, gentlemen," he remarked. "What do you say to it?"

"It is the only proper course to take," replied de Canillac promptly, with his finger and thumb in the box.

"Assuredly," assented the three others.

"Then, M. le duc," went on the captain, "you agree to our plan?"

The duke helped himself to a pinch of snuff and looked out of the window.

"My dear de Charost," he replied, "I should be very pleased to do what you suggest, if I had not a better plan."

"What is that, M. le duc?"

"To do nothing at all."

The duc de Charost looked, in his turn, as if he thought the duke was a little out of his mind.

"Nothing at all, monsieur?" he echoed.

"No. Why should I? To-morrow I shall be regent, and nothing in earth or heaven can prevent it. Thus there is no occasion to take the slightest trouble in the matter."

The duke delivered his utterance with such unbounded confidence that his hearers stared at him in complete bewilderment.

"At the same time," proceeded the duke, "I think it is due to you all I should give you the grounds for my conviction, because, apart from those reasons, the course you suggest would probably be the wisest for me to follow. Come into my cabinet."

The party followed the duke into his private room, and at a sign from him seated themselves to listen to the promised explanation.

"What I have to tell you, gentlemen," began the duke, "is so incredible that you would be justified in refusing to believe it on any single man's evidence, although I give you my word of honor, as a gentleman and a son of France, that it is all the simple truth. Fortunately M. de St. Simon will most likely be able to attest my story, as it was told to him at the time of its occurrence, and he will recollect enough to convince you of the exactitude of my own memory."

A sudden light seemed to come into St. Simon's face.

"I begin to understand now, M. le duc," he said. "I had forgotten that affair, I assure you."

"So I supposed," replied the duke. "Well, gentlemen, just before I set out for the campaign in Italy in 1706, it happened one evening that we were making some experiments in clairvoyance at madame la comtesse d'Argenton's house in Paris. The comtesse had found someone who certainly seemed to possess rather curious powers, and this man was present. He asked if we could provide a child, young and innocent, to assist in his operations. It happened that there was a little girl of eight or nine who had been born in the house, had never lived out of it, and was just the person required. Our magician asked for a glass of water. Over this he mumbled something, and then told the child to look into it. Some of the guests then wished, one by one, to know what was happening in some distant place or other, and the little girl looked in the glass and described what she saw."

"I fancy I could do as much as that myself," observed d'Argenson.

"Wait a little, my dear fellow," said the duke. "As we had all had a pretty considerable experience in impostors of various kinds, I thought of a simple test for this man. I asked the child to tell us what was going on at madame de Nancre's house, a short distance off. She at once described the people there, the sitters at the different card-tables, the bystanders, the furniture, everything in fact. M. de Nancre was with us, and I instantly packed him off to report as to what was actually doing in his house. He

came back, and said it was all absolutely as the child had described."

"Hm! I confess that would require some little management," admitted d'Argenson.

"All that is only the beginning," went on the duke. "It seemed promising, as you may suppose, and it occurred to me to ask if anything could be foreseen of the future. So I asked for a vision of the scene of the king's death. The child knew nothing of Versailles, and had never seen anyone belonging to the court except myself."

"I think she knew madame de Ventadour," corrected St. Simon.

"Yes; but madame de Ventadour was not then at court," replied the duke.

"That is true."

"Well, gentlemen, this child looked in the glass of water and described what she saw. It was the king's bedroom here, furnished as it is now and not as it was then, with the king in his bed, and the bystanders around. The child cried out at recognizing two of the persons who stood near the bed. One was myself; the other was madame de Ventadour, whom she used to see at madame d'Argenton's, and whom she described as holding by the hand a little child with the Order."

"The duc d'Anjou, evidently," said de Charost, astonished.

"Who was not born till four years afterwards," added de Canillac.

"Exactly," said the duke. "Then she made us recognize Fagon, my wife, the princesse de Conti, the present duc de Bourbon-Condé, the present prince de Conti, M. du Maine, and M. de Toulouse—all of whom, as you are aware, were present at the king's death this morning. Now I beg of you to observe, gentlemen, that in 1706 MM. du Maine and de Toulouse would have no right to be present at all; they were not then legitimated, and not a word had ever been said about their legitimation."

"Still, such a thing might have been guessed," put in d'Argenson.

"Granted," replied the duke. "But I defy you to say that anybody could guess what followed. Listen, gentlemen! In spite of all my questions, and all sorts of

promptings from the others, we could not get the child to recognize in her vision any one corresponding to Monseigneur, to the duc de Bourgogne or the duchesse, the duc de Berri, M. le Prince, M. le duc, or the younger prince de Conti*—all of whom would, as you know, have had an equal right to be present at the king's bedside. This puzzled us beyond measure. Every one of the seven was in the best of health and strength, while the king was then nearly seventy years old. Yet, as you know, all seven have died since that evening at madame d'Argenton's, and the king outlived the whole of them. I narrated this to M. de St. Simon at Marly the next morning, and he will tell you whether my memory serves me correctly."

"It is perfectly correct," said St. Simon. "I may say that I made complete notes of the affair at once, and have them still amongst my journals.† But that is not all, M. le duc."

"No. Gentlemen, after the child had told us everything she could, I asked to know what would become of myself. That could not be seen in the glass. But the expert offered to produce the semblance of myself like a picture on the wall, if I had no objection. After several minutes, spent in some performance I could not understand, my image appeared suddenly upon the wall like a painting, life-size, dressed as I then was, but wearing a crown. This crown had four circles, and covered my head. It was neither that of France, England, Spain or the Empire, and in fact I neither knew nor could guess what it was in the least. You, gentlemen, are perfectly welcome to think it meant nothing at all. For myself, after such a wonderful fulfilment of the very complicated prophecy of the circumstances of the king's death, nothing will persuade me that the unknown crown was not intended to indicate the regency."

* The prince de Condé (died 1709) and his son, the duc de Bourbon (died 1710), were always known respectively as 'M. le Prince' and 'M. le Duc' *par excellence*. MM. de Conti (died 1709) and de Condé were first cousins.

† The curious in these matters may find St. Simon's own account in the famous 'Mémoires' (vol. xiii., p. 458; edition Hachette).

"I have only to add," said St. Simon, "that although, as everyone knows, I detest and despise all fortune-telling, divination, seeking after forbidden things, and the like impious superstitions, there is one thing certain, namely, that M. le duc told me all this at the time we are speaking of. But——"

"But," interrupted the duke, "as M. de St. Simon was probably going to say, I have not told you the one weak point in this affair. It is this. Besides the persons I have mentioned, the child described madame de Maintenon as standing near the king's bed. Now, as you know, the marquise has not left St. Cyr since she retired there a couple of days ago. You must account for that flaw as you choose. The only explanations that occur to me are these. Either the king's dying may be considered to have commenced on Friday, when he became delirious, and when the marquise was still with him; or, secondly, the vision was symbolical, and intended chiefly to indicate who would be alive and who would be dead at the time of his majesty's decease."

The lieutenant-general of police scratched his chin meditatively.

"I confess," said he finally, "that but for M. de St. Simon's recollection of being told of this affair at the date of its occurrence, I should have felt convinced that it was either an hallucination or a vivid dream of M. le duc's, happening recently, and read back, as it were, into the past. But as it is, I have nothing to say. Certainly I never heard anything like it."

De Charost and the two others were too deeply impressed to make any comment, and the duke went on,

"Now that you know why I expect the regency, gentlemen, let me tell you, once for all, that personally I do not care a *sou* for it. I shall claim it, because it is my right, and because to waive my right would leave the state in very dangerous hands. But I assure you I look upon the whole thing as a nuisance, all the greater because, unluckily, it comes just at the wrong time."

"How, M. le duc?" asked de Charost, who seemed rather relieved at the new development of things.

"Why, I was just preparing to have a pleasant time of it," replied the duke. "You know that since poor Hum-

bert died last year, my chemistry has been at a standstill, and my laboratory might as well be shut up. He was invaluable to me, and I have found no one to supply his place. Latterly I have been in correspondence with the famous professor Scholtzius of Heidelberg, asking him to take Humbert's post, and he has constantly refused. But last month he wrote saying that he had persuaded his most able colleague, his right-hand man, to pay a visit to Paris, and to remain for a time with me if desired. Now, you see, instead of enjoying myself making stinks, as St. Simon puts it, I shall have to be bored with governing the kingdom."

"At all events, M. le duc," said St. Simon, in a resigned tone, "you will have less leisure for daubing."

The worthy St. Simon has recorded that after the death of the chemist Humbert, in 1714, M. d'Orléans took to oil painting as a hobby for his afternoons, a pursuit whose degrading character shocked the chronicler even more terribly than the ducal impiety and chemistry, against which he conscientiously inveighed at all times and seasons.

"Heavens! my dear friend," responded the duke, "get out of the pulpit, or I vow I will let loose my new chemist upon you with all his most astonishing stench. He ought to be in Paris by this time. But let us return to the salon; I think we all understand each other now."

As the party passed out of the cabinet M. de Torcy met them, coming to pay his respects to the duke.

"Here is the first vulture settling down upon my doomed carcass," grumbled the duke, pointing to the foreign secretary's portfolio. "Spare me till to-morrow, my dear marquis, unless you will hide that portfolio somewhere, and come to dine with me at the Palais-Royal."

The marquis bowed, and glanced keenly at the duke for a moment.

"Ah! you are then leaving here, M. le duc?" he remarked negligently.

Something in his look and tone caused the duke instantly to change his mind.

"*Peste!*" he said to himself, "these Colberts always manage to be right. Why should I leave du Maine at the top of the dunghill? It will be an abdication."

"On second thoughts, no," he replied aloud. "It will

disappoint the cook here, who really does his best for me, although he is deplorably behind my own M. Robert. Tomorrow morning will be early enough. And please remember, gentlemen, one thing above all others!"

"What is that, M. le duc?" asked the party in chorus.

"You must all say the most beautiful things about MM. du Maine and de Toulouse—recollect a big pill wants a lot of sugar."

"I should like to be quite sure about the pill," muttered d'Argenson *sotto voce*. M. de Torcy smiled imperceptibly. At this moment M. de Simiane, who had been signalled to the gallery door, returned to the duke's side, saying,

"I think your expected arrival from Heidelberg is here, M. le duc."

"Bravo!" said the duke, "bring him in."

De Simiane nodded to an usher in the doorway, and the official stepped back to allow the newcomer to pass. A tall man, upon whom the eyes of the party were at once fixed, appeared within the doorway, and bowed before coming forward. M. de Torcy started, and the duke uttered an exclamation of delight.

"M. Randolph Dorrington," he cried, "by all that's wonderful!"

"M. Gwynett!" stammered the marquis, in utter stupefaction.

"M. le chevalier de Starhemberg," announced the usher from the doorway.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE 1ST OF SEPTEMBER, 1715.

THE duke went hastily forward and shook Gwynett warmly by the hand.

"My dear sir," he said, "this is a delightful surprise. Is it really you whom Dr. Scholtzius has sent me?"

"Certainly, M. le duc."

"Admirable! I was just thinking of you—not in the least as an expected savant, but in connection with our little adventure of three years ago. I have never forgiven you for running away unthanked as you did. But I am not quite sure to whom I have the honor of speaking; M. de Torcy, surely you told me this gentleman's name was M. Randolph Dorrington?"

"It was a mistake, M. le duc," explained the marquis, shaking hands with Gwynett, and looking a little confused as he met d'Argenson's eye.

"And just now you used some other name, which I did not quite catch."

"That was nothing—a slip of the tongue," replied de Torcy hastily.

"Well, marquis, when you have made up your mind what to call your friend, I will introduce him to the others here."

"M. le duc," observed Gwynett, "the usher announced me quite correctly."

"It is M. le chevalier de Starhemberg," explained de Torcy. "A distant relation of comte de Starhemberg, the Imperial general."

"That begins to be intelligible," said the duke, introducing Gwynett to the five bystanders. "Gentlemen, this is the hero of the adventure you all know about, when my life was saved in the Rue St. Honore after the mob had upset my carriage—a service which it is possible may turn

out very conveniently for some of you, to say nothing of myself."

This exordium was naturally sufficient to secure for its subject a more than respectful reception from the group, and the duke went on,

"I daresay that MM. de Torcy, de Canillac, de Simiane, and d'Argenson have forgotten something which I said to them on that occasion, and which is extraordinarily *à propos* to-day. I told you that this gentleman had called me 'monseigneur,' did I not?"

"I recollect that," said d'Argenson.

"After what I have just told you of the evening at madame d'Argenton's, was I not justified in thinking it curious?"

"I do not contradict you, M. le duc."

"*Parbleu!* I should think not. Meanwhile, let M. de Starhemberg have the credit of being a prophet without knowing it. To-morrow you shall all call me monseigneur, as he did three years ago."

"I really begin to believe it," said de Charost. "But now, M. le duc, you must excuse me. I shall go with major Contades to make the round of the regiments on our own account, in readiness for to-morrow at the Palais de Justice. In the meantime, place my services at the disposal of M. de Starhemberg in any way I can be of use to him."

Gwynett and the captain exchanged salutations, and the latter went off to his Guards, while the lieutenant-general of police whispered to de Torcy,

"What nonsense did you tell me about an old man who had spent seventeen years in the Bastille? This is quite a young fellow."

"Hush! my dear d'Argenson—it is all a mistake. I will explain it some other time."

"M. de Torcy," said the duke, "as you and M. de Starhemberg seem to be old friends, I will restrain my impatience to talk over our mutual hobby with him, and leave him in your hands for the rest of the day—unless he has other arrangements."

Gwynett disclaimed having any programme, and de Torcy replied to the duke,

"As you cannot start making stenchies with M. de Star-

hemberg till you return to the Palais-Royal, M. le duc, I shall be delighted to have the opportunity of renewing my acquaintance with him."

"Very good," said the duke. "M. de Starhemberg, M. de Conflans will do his best for you at the Palais-Royal, and the sooner you do me the honor to take up your quarters there, the better I shall be pleased. Au revoir, messieurs."

The marquis took Gwynett off to his cabinet, and asked eagerly for an explanation of his startlingly unexpected reappearance. This was given in full, as Gwynett saw no reasons for concealing the facts of the case so long as they were not allowed to transpire; and he brought down his history to the day of his departure from Dover, an hour or two after the duke of Marlborough had sailed for Antwerp.

"You will see, M. le marquis," he remarked parenthetically, "that I was not only prevented from executing the commission with which lady Melfort was good enough to charge me, but the letter is unfortunately lost into the bargain. I must ask you to make some sort of apology for me in the matter."

"Don't let that trouble you, my dear M. de Starhemberg. Just after you left, my cousin took it into her head to become devout, and she has probably forgotten all about the letter—which you may rest assured was not of the smallest consequence. There is another piece of news, however, which is a little more important—for you, at all events. Your ship the *Fleur de Lys* is at the bottom of the sea."

"Indeed! how did that happen?"

"She caught fire and foundered on her voyage to England, only a week or two after we left her at Calais. I heard of it by chance some months later. And what have you been doing since you left Dover?"

"I stayed with my uncle about a year," replied Gwynett. "Then he suddenly astonished everybody by getting married to the daughter of one of his neighbors—a girl of about a quarter his age. I left his house shortly after that."

"The new baroness made the place too hot to hold you, I suppose?"

"No, indeed; it was so much the other way that I had no choice but to escape before something ridiculous happened."

"So!" said the marquis, rather amused. "And then?"

"After that I went back to England in disguise to try and learn something about my betrothed and her father and Noel Wray. But neither my lawyer nor I could get any intelligence at all. The *Mermaid* had not come home, the Wrays were said to be still in America, Wray Manor and Dorrington Hall were both shut up, and nobody could be found to tell us anything. Rather curiously, I discovered quite by chance that at Will's Coffee-house, where I used to put up in London, a letter was waiting for Mr. Dorrington."

The marquis decided at once that this must be the duke of Marlborough's letter concerning the Brest expedition, which he had addressed to Mr. Dorrington three years before, and of which he had heard nothing since.

"Indeed?" he remarked.

"I gave the landlord another to keep for Mr. Dorrington, if he should turn up there, in which I told him where I should be heard of."

"Evidently my little plan has miscarried," thought the marquis. "M. de Marlborough is more lucky than he knows of."

"I then went to Heidelberg," proceeded Gwynett, "and entered the laboratory of Dr. Scholtzius. I made another visit to England last autumn, with the same object as before, and with the same want of success. Since then I have remained at Heidelberg, until the doctor asked me if I would care to go and assist M. d'Orléans. I thought it would be an agreeable change, especially as I found domestic matters there rather trying."

"How was that?"

"My landlord's household unfortunately became desperately fond of me, and used to insist on my joining the family circle now and then. They belonged to the class of people who talk about their acquaintances."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the marquis sympathetically.

"I made an heroic effort, and moved to another lodging, pursued by the tears of the four youngest children. The

same thing happened again, except that my new landlord's family talked about themselves."

"That is the bottom, without doubt," observed the marquis. "I fancy they have much more interesting conversation than that at Charenton.* I am quite sure the lower animals do not talk about their families or friends. There are a lot of rookeries round my place in Picardy, and I often used to listen to the enormous chattering that went on amongst them. My impression was that, as they were close to the frontier, they were discussing foreign affairs. But go on."

"I was making inquiries for a deaf and dumb household," went on Gwynett, "when Dr. Scholtzius received the last letter from M. d'Orléans. He handed it over to me, and it struck me as being very *à propos*. Thus I am here."

"May I ask what you suggest in connection with any of the people who knew you, during your first visit, as M. Ambrose Gwynett, and who have all, like myself, thought you were dead?"

"My uncle and I," replied Gwynett, "have invented a cousin of mine of the same name, whose death has been mistaken for mine. That explanation will pass muster here, as well as in Munich. There are very few people in France who knew me by my real name, and if necessary it can easily be explained to those few that my full name is Gwynett de Starhemberg. This will serve for your nephew M. de Lavalaye, his *fiancée* at Calais, and her father, M. Daguerre."

"My nephew is now married," said the marquis. "He and his wife will be as surprised and pleased to see you as I am. He is living at Versailles at present; but it is possible that after to-morrow we may all find it necessary to return to Paris."

"I come back here at a very critical juncture, it appears. When I saw the king nearly four years ago, I did not suppose he would live so long."

"Nor I. Something curious happened in the early summer of this year. I used to read the Dutch journals to the king every morning, and one day I stumbled, before I

*The great prison of Paris for criminal lunatics.

was aware of it, into a piece of gossip to the effect that in London heavy bets were being laid that his majesty would not last till September 1st."

"That is to-day?"

"Yes. The king noticed my boggling, and insisted upon my reading the whole passage. He said nothing; but I am sure he never forgot the affair. Not that it could have made much difference. His majesty had acquired such a confirmed habit of surviving his descendants that it has left matters very awkwardly."

"Since I arrived here, I have been assured that if I have the opportunity of working with M. d'Orléans at our pet science, it will most likely have to be in the Bastille."

The marquis shrugged his shoulders.

"We will drive to Paris and back again to-day," he said, "and you can judge for yourself how things are likely to go."

Whatever might be the sentiments entertained at Versailles towards the party of M. du Maine, madame de Maintenon, and the Jesuits, there was no doubt whatever as to the attitude of the populace, whether in Paris or out of it. As the marquis and Gwynett drove in during the afternoon, the whole aspect of affairs might be taken for that of some great day of popular rejoicing. Booths for drinking, dancing, and music were being erected at the roadsides and at corners of the streets, laughing and singing could be heard in every *cabaret*, and little banners were streaming from many windows. Piles of firewood for bonfires stood in convenient open spaces, with gibbets on which to hang Jesuits in effigy. Hideous caricatures of the detested père Tellier were on sale at the bookshops, together with pasquinades on madame de Maintenon by a certain young wit just out of his teens, named l'Arouet, who chose to turn his name into Voltaire. Groups of boys and women promenaded the highways shouting "Down with the Jesuits!" and immense crowds gathered round the Palais-Royal to cheer for the duc d'Orléans, the parliament, and the princes of the blood. Everywhere there were evidences of satisfaction or relief, and it was difficult to discover any signs of sorrow, however conventional, at the passing away of the monarch who had reigned

over France for seventy-two years, and who, during a generation and a half, had been loved and worshipped almost as a god.

"Although I had foreseen a good deal of this for a long time," said de Torcy, as the carriage passed a whole streetful of merry-makers, "it seems almost incredible now it has come. I recollect 1686, when the king was so dangerously ill, as well as yesterday. Then the whole nation was in a perfect ecstasy of grief and terror—the churches crowded day and night, business at a standstill, women crying wherever one went, a pile of offerings at every roadside Calvary; it was as if the end of the world was at hand."

"In England we have never had time or inclination to reach that stage of things," remarked Gwynett; "partly because we have had eight rulers while you have had only one, and partly because every one of the eight has been hated like poison by at least half of the kingdom."

"From all we learn just now," replied de Torcy, "your George I. is not so much hated by a few as disliked by everybody. You are somewhat on the side of the chevalier de St. George, if I recollect right?"

"I am not enough of a partisan to recommend a civil war for his benefit, monsieur."

"Then you have no objection to meet Whigs in Paris?"

"None at all. But why?"

"Because, if you wish to be correctly in society in Paris, you must put in an appearance at the comtesse de Valincour's, and lord Stair spends half his time there. Do you recollect her?"

"If it is the lady I met at madame de Melfort's once, she is not a person to be forgotten."

"That is she. And talking of—ahem! angels—here she is, if I am not mistaken."

A carriage and six was just passing them on the way to Versailles, and the marquis had time to recognize the occupant as madame de Valincour. The check-strings of both carriages were pulled simultaneously, the vehicles stopped, and M. de Torcy got out to speak to the comtesse.

"I am just going out to see madame de Ventadour, marquis," she explained. "Have you any news?"

"You have no doubt heard all the news I could tell you, comtesse."

"Then the king is really dead, and the parliament meets to-morrow to open the will?"

"Yes."

"And M. d'Orléans?"

"He remains at Versailles."

"That is sensible. Are you alone?"

"No; I am showing a friend, just arrived from Heidelberg, how the good people of Paris take the great event. I think you have met him—M. de Starhemberg."

The lips of the comtesse parted. She became suddenly pale, and then a little flush spread over her cheeks.

"Are you not well, comtesse?" asked the watchful marquis.

"Quite. I find this hot weather rather tiring, that is all. I recollect M. de Starhemberg very well. Is he making any stay in Paris?"

"Probably. But I will bring him here to answer for himself."

The marquis went back to the carriage, and returned with Gwynett, whom the comtesse received with exceeding graciousness. After a few commonplaces, she tendered an invitation to call upon her at her hôtel in Paris and to consider her receptions open to him. This, of course, was accepted; and madame de Valincour, nodding a farewell, drove off towards Versailles.

"Decidedly my star is in the ascendant," thought the comtesse, as she lay back on the cushions, her face radiant with triumphant happiness. "Madame des Ursins an exile, the king dead at last, the duke at my feet—and now, to meet *him* again!"

"What is the matter, Yvonne?" asked the duchesse de Ventadour, when the friends were alone together in the little king's rooms at Versailles. "I never saw your eyes look so bright before. Are you expecting that M. d'Orléans will put you back in the household here?"

"That is it, my dear friend," replied the comtesse laughing. "You have a wonderful knack of guessing things."

"You see I know you so well," said madame de Ventadour complacently.

CHAPTER VI.

A COUP D'ÉTAT.

LOUIS XIV. died on Sunday, September 1st, 1715. Between five and six o'clock the following morning a party of peers, headed by St. Simon, met at the house of the archbishop of Rheims. The gathering was called to decide on the course to be adopted in view of the probability that, at the forthcoming meeting of the parliament of Paris, the first president would perpetrate the outrage of keeping his hat on while he called for the votes of the peers. After nearly two hours' discussion, it was agreed to make a formal postponement of the ducal grievances in accordance with the request of M. d'Orléans the day before. This done, the party adjourned to the Palais de Justice.

It was now seven o'clock. The parliament had assembled, most of the noble and legal members were seated in the great hall, and an enormous crowd of people filled the precincts of the Palais. It was seen that the du Maine party had mustered in their full strength, and the adherents of the duc d'Orléans felt a good deal of uneasiness at the possible result of the crisis.

In order to accord as strong a position as possible to his illegitimate children, Louis XIV. had married Marie-Anne de Blois (his daughter by la Vallière) to the elder of the two princes de Conti, and Louise-Françoise de Nantes (his daughter by Madame de Montespan) to the duc de Bourbon-Condé (known as "M. le Duc"). On the other hand, the duc du Maine, brother to mademoiselle de Nantes and half-brother to mademoiselle de Blois, had been married to M. le Duc's sister, Louise-Benedicte de Bourbon.* This princess was a woman of unbounded ambition, a sworn foe to the duc d'Orléans,

* Styled mademoiselle de le Charolais.

hand-in-glove with madame de Maintenon and the Jesuits, and ready to use any means whatever to push forward her husband's interests at the expense of those of his rival. Had her brother, M. le Duc, and her cousins, the two princes de Conti, been living at this juncture, their influence would have been of considerable service. But M. le Duc had died in 1710, and the surviving Conti in 1709; and although each had left a son to represent his house, these were not yet quite of age, and moreover were, if anything, rather attracted to M. d'Orléans. Nevertheless, the beauty, energy, and audacity of the Condé princess made and held together a party not easy to reckon with, and only requiring the support of the king's will and codicil to be formidable.

Perhaps it was in view of this state of things that the duc de Guiche, in temporary command of the king's Guards on this occasion, interpreted his instructions sufficiently liberally to place a couple of thousand of his men, all Orléanists, at different doorways of the Palais de Justice—a service for which ill-natured people afterwards asserted that he received six hundred thousand francs from the duc d'Orléans.

Seven or eight minutes after St. Simon and his brother malcontents had taken their places, a sudden lull in the hum of conversation was caused by the entry of the duc du Maine and his brother the comte de Toulouse. The former looked round with an air of somewhat insolent assurance, while his brother preserved the impassive stolidity which always characterized him. The duc du Maine made his way up the hall, walking with his usual limp. This limp had raised the "*veuve* Scarron" from the nursery to the side of the throne, for it was the congenital deformity of the eldest son of madame de Montespan and the king which had led to his being sent by Dr. d'Aquin to the waters of Barèges, and placed for this purpose under the care of the future marquise de Maintenon. The two brothers took their seats on the president's dais, next to the places of the princes of the blood.

A minute or two later the young MM. de Bourbon-Condé and de Conti arrived, bowed to their uncles, and seated themselves between the latter and the president.

Finally, a tremendous uproar of cheering, which reached even to the doors of the great hall, announced the approach of M. d'Orléans, who was ostentatiously escorted by almost every officer of the regiments in the capital. All eyes were fixed upon the duke as he came up the hall, bowing right and left to his friends, and took his seat, as first prince of the blood, next to the president. The latter, after waiting a moment for silence, exchanged glances with the duc d'Orléans, uncovered, and rose to address the assembly.

"Messieurs du parlement," he said, "I announce to you, with profound grief, the death of our sovereign, his most Christian majesty Louis XIV. His crown descends to his great-grandson, M. le duc d'Anjou, Louis XV. *Vive le roi!*"

All the members rose to their feet, the peers uncovering and covering again, and then resumed their seats.

"Messieurs du parlement," went on the president, "his late glorious majesty, knowing that provision would require to be made for the minority of his successor, whom God preserve, had the condescension just twelve months back to summon to Versailles the attorney-general and myself. His purpose was to place in our hands a sealed packet containing his will, with his orders to summon you forthwith to be told of this deposit, and to register the same—which, as you will doubtless recollect, was done. His majesty furthermore laid it upon us that immediately after his decease this parliament should be summoned and his will opened and read. It is for this purpose, messieurs du parlement, that we are now assembled."

The president sat down, and the irrepressible St. Simon rose in his place, uncovered, and put his hat on again.

"M. le premier président," said he, in a voice of portentous solemnity, "on the part of my fellow-peers and myself, I beg to say that although certain questions of procedure in this parliament, affecting our rights and dignity, call for adjustment, we waive the demand for that adjustment on the present occasion, reserving in full our claims to have the privileges of our rank recognized in the immediate future."

This exordium, of which its author was very proud, and which did nothing but arouse hostility among the "noblesse of the robe," was listened to in silence, and the duc d'Orléans rose to administer a palliative.

"M. le premier président," he began, "we shall all listen to the contents of his late majesty's will with the most profound respect. But I think it right to inform messieurs du parlement that, whatever may be the contents of the will, I claim the right, in virtue of my birth and of the fundamental laws of the realm, to act as sole regent during the minority of his present majesty, to select suitable persons to assist me in the government, to order the civil and military household of his majesty, and to dispose of the armed forces of the kingdom as may be requisite for the safety and welfare of his majesty and his subjects. It is only under these conditions, M. le premier président, that I should be able to carry out my desire and intention: first that advisory councils, instead of single officers of state, shall administer the different departments of the government; second, that distinguished legal members of this parliament shall be included in these said advisory councils; and third, that the right of addressing remonstrances to his majesty, at present in abeyance, shall be restored, forthwith and in full, to all the parliaments of the kingdom."

The duke sat down, smiling blandly, and a murmur of approval passed round amongst the judges, councillors, and peers. The duke's little speech delighted everybody except the *légitimés*. The assembly as a whole hailed the restoration of the right of "remonstrating" (of which Louis XIV. had arbitrarily deprived not only the metropolitan but the provincial parliaments) with unbounded satisfaction. The idea of substituting councils of state for the authority of individual ministers opened up an agreeable vista of opportunities, either of filling office or exercising influence, to a large number of neutral or unfriendly peers. And finally, the definite promise of a share in the administration came as a gratifying surprise to the "noblesse of the robe," with whom the Maintenon party had been at open war for a generation. The duke's diplomacy, therefore, went a long way towards neutralizing any dissatisfaction that might have attended St. Simon's offi-

cious intervention, while it did nothing to alienate the peers. M. du Maine was evidently taken aback by it, and lost a good deal of his confident look.

The president, rising again, intimated that the will would now be produced and read. He accordingly left his seat, accompanied by the attorney-general and the chief *greffier* of the parliament, and went to the tower behind the *buvette*. Here some masons were in readiness, who proceeded to make an opening at an indicated place in the wall. The removal of the stones revealed a hinged iron grid, built into the masonry, with three locks, each of which required a different key. The three functionaries produced their several keys, the bolts were shot back, and the grid was opened. Deeper in the cavity was an iron door, furnished with locks similar to those of the grid. The three keys were brought into requisition again, and the massive door swung on its hinges. In a small recess beyond was a wooden coffer, and in this coffer a sealed parchment packet. The three officials uncovered. The president took out the packet, and returned with his two companions to the great hall, each carrying his hat as if in the presence of royalty.

Arrived at his seat the president, amidst profound silence, opened the will and handed it to the councillor Dreux, with a request that he would read it aloud. This was done.

After several minor provisions, including some for the keeping up of the institution at St. Cyr, the will proceeded to appoint a council of regency to govern the kingdom during the minority of the duc d'Anjou, now Louis XV. It was to consist of the duc d'Orléans, those princes of the blood who were over twenty-four years of age, the four secretaries of state, the chancellor, the chief of the council of finance, the comptroller-general of finance, and the marshals Villeroi, Villars, d'Uxelles, de Tallard, and d'Harcourt. Everything in this council was to be decided by a majority. The entire and irresponsible command of the household troops was given to the duc du Maine. Maréchal Villeroi was appointed governor to the new king, with MM. de Saumery and Geoffreville as sub-governors; but M. du Maine (or, if he were dead, M. de Tou-

louse) was to have an inspectorship and superintendence over everything relating to the king's education.

An irrepressible murmur arose out of the silence that accompanied the reading of the will. MM. de Bourbon-Condé and de Conti were not yet twenty-four. With the exception of M. de Torcy, the foreign secretary, every person named for the council of regency was a mere tool of the Maintenon party. With the household troops at the command of the duc du Maine, the whole state was delivered over, bound hand and foot, to the clique of the *légitimés*. If the will were carried out, the liberty and life of the duc d'Orléans would not be worth a day's purchase. His inclusion in the council of regency was, under the circumstances, a mere farce.

A glow of triumph lit up the face of the duc du Maine as the reading of the will was concluded. The comte de Toulouse gazed at the president with a perfectly expressionless countenance. The duc d'Orléans smiled serenely and helped himself to snuff. M. Dreux sat down, and the president rose again, holding in his hand another document.

"Messieurs du parlement," he said, "I have further to announce to you that this morning M. le chancelier Voysin placed in my hands this document, respecting which he will make you a communication."

The chancellor rose, looking rather uncomfortable. Everybody knew the equivocal circumstances under which the codicil had been extorted from the king, and a fresh murmur swept over the hall. Evidently the atmosphere of the Palais de Justice was not so sympathetic as that of Versailles.

"Messieurs du parlement," began the chancellor, "I have the honor to inform you that yesterday week his late majesty entrusted me with a codicil to his will, ordering me to have it produced at the same time as his will, and considered in connection with it. I have therefore this morning, in discharge of my duty, placed it in the hands of M. le premier président."

The chancellor sat down, and the duc d'Orléans whispered some suggestion in the ear of the president. The latter nodded approvingly, and in place of the councillor Dreux (who had been heard with great difficulty), requested

the abbé Menguy to read the codicil aloud. This the abbé proceeded to do, in a voice which reached the public in the corridors.

The codicil confirmed the assignment of control over the civil and military household of the new king to the duc du Maine, gave him the command of all the regiments in and around Paris, and nominated maréchal Villeroi as his deputy in all things connected with the royal service.

The reading of the codicil went visibly to encourage the duc du Maine and his party, and a good deal of excitement began to show itself amongst the assembly. At a glance from the president the duc d'Orléans again rose, and said:

“Messieurs du parlement, it appears to me that we may conveniently discuss, and settle first, the question of the regency, leaving the matters referred to in the codicil to be dealt with afterwards. As regards his late majesty's will, messieurs, I have only to say that its tenor is entirely at variance with his majesty's own words to me on Sunday week, when he assured me that I should find nothing in his will but what would please me. I may also remind several of those now present that his majesty, the following day, intimated to the *entrées* that I should be entrusted with the government of the kingdom. As these repeated assurances of his majesty accord with justice, with my rights as first prince of the blood, and with the best interests of the monarchy, I call upon you, messieurs, to affirm that his late majesty was not aware of the real contents of the will he had been induced to sign, and that it is therefore invalid. And I claim in consequence to be nominated sole regent, with the right to select and appoint those councillors, ministers, and commanders, civil and military, whom I may deem the most capable and worthy to serve the interests of his majesty and the country.”

A murmur of applause and assent came from all parts of the great hall as the duke resumed his seat, and cries of “Agreed!” rose from among both the peers and the lawyers. The duc du Maine changed countenance, and rose to speak, without waiting for MM. de Bourbon and de Conti, who of course had the prior right. Noticing this, the duc d'Orléans leaned forward and intervened with a curt “You will speak in your turn, monsieur.” Du

Maine sank back in his seat completely disconcerted. The Orléanist sympathizers started a chorus of "Vote! Vote!" which was echoed by a large majority of the assembly; and the president decided, with the wisdom of the serpent, to call for a decision without inviting any further expressions of opinion.

"Messieurs du parlement," said he, rising, "do you acclaim M. le duc d'Orléans sole regent, with full and complete powers?"

A roar of assent came from the assembly, and not a single voice was raised in opposition. The comte de Toulouse sat in impassive silence, and the duc du Maine confined himself to biting his nails nervously.

The president sat down, and the duc d'Orléans rose again.

"Messieurs du parlement," he said, "I thank you for your decision. I beg to propose, as part of your decree, that all matters of general government shall be decided by a majority of voices in a council of regency, of which M. le duc de Bourbon shall be chief, and in which the regent shall have a casting vote in case of equality only."

This proposal at once detached the Condé party from the faction of the duc du Maine, and was approved by acclamation as vigorously as the former one.

"Messieurs," proceeded the duke, "we have now to consider the matters referred to in the codicil. Whatever I have said about his late majesty's will applies with equal or greater force to the codicil, and I have only to add that I cannot consent to place my own life and liberty, and the security of the king's person, in hands over which I shall have no control whatever. To carry on the government under such conditions would be impossible. I have the honor therefore, messieurs, to call for the abrogation of the codicil."

The duke resumed his seat amid fresh applause. The duc du Maine, recognizing that it was now or never, rose and stammered forth a defence of his claim. Without contesting the decision arrived at with regard to the regency, he urged that the education of the young king and the care of his person had been expressly confided to him by his late majesty, and that to fulfill this duty and to answer for the royal safety he must have control over the

civil and military household. He followed up this by some little vaunting of his love for the late king and of the confidence reposed in him by the latter, and was proceeding to eulogize his designated colleague, Villeroi, when the duc d'Orléans interrupted him.

"Pardon me, monsieur," he said. "Let us understand one another. Do you suggest that I shall act as regent under the military dictatorship of yourself and M. le maréchal Villeroi?"

Du Maine muttered that there was no question of a military dictatorship.

"Indeed?" replied the duke, blandly. "Then do me the favor, monsieur, to select a better term for an arrangement under which the regent and the councils of state may be put in the Bastille whenever M. du Maine chooses."

This little dialogue led to a general discussion, which was passing from warm to riotous when the duc d'Orléans and two of his chief advisers, the ducs de St. Simon and de la Force, after putting their heads together in one of the committee-rooms, proposed to the hungry parliamentarians that they should adjourn for dinner and settle the remainder of the details of government when they reassembled. It was now nearly two o'clock, and the proposition was agreed to forthwith.

An interval of two hours was spent by the Orléanist leaders, including the future chancellor d'Aguesseau, the attorney-general, the chief advocate-general Fleury, MM. de Canillac and de Conflans, and others, in detaching the remnants of the du Maine faction; and when the members met again at four o'clock, the result of the debate was a foregone conclusion. The duke at once rose, repeated his refusal to accept a regency hampered by the proposed conditions, and appealed to the votes of the assembly to support him. The duc du Maine, speaking in a subdued tone, could scarcely obtain a hearing, and the codicil was abrogated by acclamation.

The disappointed claimant, almost weeping, asked that he should not be deprived of everything. Surely the superintendence of the education of the king, without responsibility, could be still left to him?

"With all my heart," replied the duc d'Orléans, who had no desire to push his defeated rival to extremity.

Then the old *maréchal* Villeroi rose, and a respectful reception was accorded to him by the assembly.

"Monseigneur," said the veteran modestly, "I have only to remind *messieurs du parlement* that when his late majesty did me the honor to nominate me as governor to his successor, he had doubtless not forgotten that Louis XIII. assigned a similar duty to my father."

This allusion evoked a sympathetic cheer from the whole parliament, emphasized vigorously by the companions-in-arms of the old soldier. As a matter of fact, the elder *maréchal de Villeroi*, father of Louis XV.'s designated tutor, had seventy years before been tutor to Louis XIV.

"Messieurs," remarked the *duc d'Orléans*, "I think we are all agreed that M. le *maréchal* only asks for what is due to his merits and the services of his family—is it not so?"

This was agreed to without a dissentient. The decree of regency, with the nomination of the *duc de Bourbon* as chief of the council, was then voted by acclamation, and the cheers of the assembly reached even to the streets around the *Palais de Justice*. The meeting broke up, and the regent, attended by an enormous concourse of the inhabitants of Paris, went home to the *Palais-Royal*.

About seven o'clock the same evening a messenger brought madame de Valincour a little note, which ran:

"DEAR COMTESSE,

"Is the Regent of France a political nonentity?

"PHILIPPE."

The comtesse laughed, and said to herself, "Decidedly the duke has an excellent memory."

Then she wrote across the foot of the note:

"MONSEIGNEUR,

"On the contrary.

"YVONNE."

She sealed the note up again, and sent it back by the duke's messenger.

In the morning the fashionable world of Paris learnt with profound interest that the comtesse de Valincour was to be saluted as the reigning favorite of the regent.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCESSE PALATINE.

WHILE the parliament of Paris was engaged in disposing of Louis XIV.'s last will and testament, Gwynett had taken possession of the rooms assigned to him at the Palais-Royal. Here he busied himself in overhauling the contents and arrangements of the regent's chemical laboratory, and in making memoranda of what might be desirable, in the light of his Heidelberg experiences, to effect by way of alterations and additions. This occupied him the whole of Monday, and he retired to bed without availing himself of the regent's pressing invitation to sup with him and a party of his intimates that evening.

The next morning he was at breakfast in his rooms when the regent presented himself.

"My dear M. de Starhemberg," he said, seating himself with an air of relief, "do not let me disturb you. I have no appetite, or I would ask you to permit me to join you."

"I am a little later than usual," said Gwynett, going on with his meal.

"I am afraid you are in the fashion," remarked the regent. "It seems that it has been the custom with his late majesty's ministers to start work at seven o'clock in the morning, and they expect me to countenance such laziness by sitting up for them."

Gwynett, who was of course familiar by hearsay with his host's convivial tastes, looked up rather surprised.

"You see, chevalier," went on the regent, "as I pointed out to M. de Bourbon last night, regularity of habit is essential to a busy man. Now I find that I must really get to bed by six in the morning if I am to be good for anything the next day."

The duke stopped to sniff, with his nose in the air, and then fixed his eye on the coffee-pot.

"Pardon me," he asked suddenly, "but is that coffee you have there?"

"Certainly, monseigneur," said Gwynett, passing the pot across the table. "Will you try it?"

The regent inhaled the aroma with an expression of wonder and ecstasy.

"Nectar!" he ejaculated rapturously. "If my chef sent you that, monsieur, I will have him hanged."

"Why, monseigneur?"

"For never giving me anything like it. It is a dream of paradise."

"As it happens, monseigneur, M. Robert had nothing to do with it. I prepared it myself in the laboratory, as I prefer when time permits."

"Pray explain your process to me, chevalier—unless it is a secret."

"Not at all. In the first place I brought a little coffee with me from Heidelberg, part of a present sent to Dr. Scholtzius by a Turkish correspondent at Smyrna."

"Ah! That is a good beginning, without doubt. But go on, chevalier."

"I roast a handful of raw berries in a silver or iron spoon over the spirit-lamp until they turn a golden brown. Then I crush them with a pestle in a warm iron mortar, and make the infusion at once with boiling milk—not water."

"Admirable!" cried the regent, with enthusiasm. "And that idiot St. Simon would like to persuade me that it is of no use to have a laboratory. How did you learn this inestimable method, chevalier?"

"In Spain, monseigneur, from a Greek cook in the service of M. de Vendôme."

"Indeed! Very likely one of the two servants who robbed him of his clothes when he was dying in a hut by the sea-side, left him naked, and ran away. A fine death for a prince of the blood, was it not, chevalier?"

"Good heavens! was it so?"

"*Certes!* However, by dying he escaped the chance of being made regent, which was lucky for him."

The regent sighed, sniffed at the coffee-pot again, and went on,

"I may tell you, M. de Starhemberg, that although I

always had my misgivings about this regency, I begin to fear it will be even worse than I expected. Decidedly one can do one's duty too expensively. The cares of government are rather a heavy price to pay, even for the upsetting of M. du Maine."

Gwynett had no difficulty in recognizing the duke's humor, and replied,

"It seems to me, monseigneur, that if you find the burden of a virtual sovereignty too troublesome, the remedy is very simple."

"*Parbleu!* I am glad to hear it. What is your remedy?"

"Have no government at all—or rather, insist upon the people governing themselves."

"You think so, chevalier?"

"Decidedly, monseigneur, if you ask my opinion. It really appears perfectly monstrous that your highness and your friends should have to fatigue yourselves with doing for the people, very badly indeed, what the people could do for themselves, not only very well but very easily. It simply encourages laziness."

A twinkle in the regent's eye expressed his appreciation of this suggestion.

"Really, that is a very fine idea of yours, chevalier," he observed seriously. "I will mention it to M. de St. Simon. He will probably have a fit, and then life may begin to smile upon me again. If not, I shall certainly be advised to death before next Saturday, and the *lit de justice* to register the regency will not be wanted. But in the meantime, I am forgetting the object of my intrusion upon you this morning. I want to introduce you to my mother at St. Cloud. She was told at the time all about our adventure in the Rue St. Honoré; and now that I have so happily found you again, she will never forgive me if I do not take you to her."

Gwynett bowed, and replied with a little hesitation,

"I shall be greatly honored, monseigneur. But I am sure your highness will avoid making me ridiculous by exaggerating my assistance on the occasion you speak of. Anybody can throw bricks from a roof."

"My dear chevalier," said the regent, rising, "you are not going to escape being my creditor. It is not only that you saved my life, but you have given me a recipe for

drinkable coffee. That overwhelms me, and I shall not feel comfortable till I have displayed you at St. Cloud. Will it be convenient for you to come now?"

Gwynett was a little curious to meet the redoubtable princesse Palatine, whose outspokenness had become proverbial throughout Europe. So he replied,

"I am quite at your service, monseigneur."

The regent and Gwynett went down to the courtyard, entered the state-carriage which was in waiting, and drove off to St. Cloud, where the princesse was domiciled in an entirely unpretending fashion. On their arrival they were ushered into a little cabinet, where the daughter of the elector Palatine and widow of "Monsieur," the late king's brother, was chatting with a lady in out-of-door costume. This visitor was madame de Caylus, niece of madame de Maintenon, and a famous leader of the society of the period.

The princesse was a woman of rather over sixty years of age. According to her own description of herself she had big, hanging cheeks, a large face, a small, squat, ugly figure, eyes almost too small to be seen, and villainous hands. But the face and figure thus candidly described were respectively not without a certain vivacity and dignity, and the princesse was accustomed to proclaim (chiefly for the benefit of her inveterate foe madame de Maintenon) that she knew she was liked by all honest people.

When the regent presented his guest, the princesse discarded ceremony and shook Gwynett by the hand with great heartiness.

"I am delighted to see you, M. le chevalier," she said. "It is a pleasure I never expected. Come and see me whenever you can, and go away the moment you have had enough of it. Thank heaven, we are not at Versailles, where people get exiled for being bored!"

The regent and madame de Caylus laughed. Everybody knew that the latter, for saying that the court was dull, had been forbidden to come to Versailles for more than a dozen years by Louis XIV. But she had been restored to favor for several years past, and had revenged herself by holding a salon in Paris which nobody ever accused of being dull.

"Monseigneur is more likely now to exile the bores," she said.

"That would mean emptying Versailles, madame," replied the regent. "I shall adopt a more drastic measure than that. You know I am a very vindictive sort of person."

"Well?" asked the princesse.

"My mother, I shall leave the place alone."

"But the court, my son?" asked the princesse, with an appreciative grin.

"As to that," replied the regent, "I have the impression that my nephew's health will be improved by the air of Vincennes. For myself, I find the Palais-Royal as comfortable as I can desire."

Madame de Caylus seemed rather interested in this announcement.

"Is this a secret, monseigneur?" she asked.

"Not in the least, madame."

"I ask, because I am on my way to St. Cyr."

"By all means. Do me the favor to tell the marquise that I shall have the honor of waiting upon her in a day or two."

Madame de Caylus, who was much attached to the marquise, looked a little alarmed at this programme.

"I think, monseigneur, you must excuse me," she said. "My aunt has had much to try her of late, and——"

"You are quite right, madame," replied the regent drily. "'Sufficient for the day,' etc., etc."

Madame de Caylus went off, and the princesse turned to Gwynett with a request that he would be seated and consider himself at home.

"You seem a very honest lad," she observed approvingly. "Don't let my son spoil you, either by precept or example. He is one of those fools who are never satisfied unless they can make themselves out worse than they are. His one ambition is to pose as a little Satan."

"Bear all this in mind, chevalier," said the regent cheerfully. "My mother is a wonderful judge of character."

"Hold your tongue," retorted the princesse. "Nevertheless, M. le chevalier, he is really a very good sort of fellow at bottom, and that vexes me. Why should he

spend all his time in giving a handle to that pack of hypocrites and toadies at Versailles?"

Gwynett was not exactly prepared with a reply to this inquiry, and the princesse went on,

"These pretenders to saintliness turn my stomach, M. le chevalier. But that does not make it any the more pleasant for me to hear my son's name used by every enemy of religion. What is your religion, monsieur, if I may ask?"

"I was brought up a Protestant, madame."

"So was I," remarked the princesse, who was a little apt to be discursive in her conversation. "When I arrived at the frontier, on my way to be married here, they sent three bishops to convert me, as part of the bargain. Each of them taught me something different to the other two, but by picking out what suited me I found I could become a very passable Catholic. If they had done the same with those poor Cevennois it would have been all right. But the dragonnades and the war in the Palatinate were simply damnable; I have never forgiven either the great man or the old woman for those things."

These terms were usually employed by the princesse to designate Louis XIV. and madame de Maintenon. The regent, who knew that any reminiscence of the desolating of her native country by Louvois invariably excited his mother to fury, endeavored to create a diversion by saying,

"Madame, these matters were a little before the chevalier's time."

"That is true, and they have made me forget my chocolate," replied the princesse, ringing a bell. "But all the same, M. le chevalier, these people have been so atrocious that my son is an ass to put himself in the wrong with them."

A lady-in-waiting entered at the sound of the bell.

"Send Thekla with my chocolate," said the princesse.

The lady went out, and the princesse continued her diatribes against Louis XIV. and madame de Maintenon.

"All this shows what we get from petticoat government," she remarked finally. "We have a proverb in Germany, M. le chevalier, that 'where the devil cannot go him-

self, he sends an old woman.' He must be rather busy at St. Cyr."

At this moment a cup of chocolate was brought in on a salver by a bright-looking, handsome girl of about sixteen, whose face seemed vaguely familiar to Gwynett.

"As you know, Philippe," went on the princesse, "I am not fond of having men-servants about me. This is a granddaughter of your old nurse Tausch. Her mother is settled at Nonancourt."

The regent nodded good-naturedly, and the girl executed a profound curtsy.

"Her father and grandfather were both butchered when Heidelberg was sacked by that demon Louvois," explained the princesse, gulping down her chocolate. "This is perfect swill," she added snappishly to the maid.

"On the contrary, madame," retorted the girl promptly, "I made it myself, and it is just as usual."

"Perhaps it is," returned the princesse, without appearing to resent the contradiction. "I cannot taste anything when I am in a bad temper."

She took another sip, and the girl, with the freedom she was obviously accustomed to use, bent down and whispered in her ear.

"Madame, this is the gentleman I told you about."

"What's that?" asked the princesse.

"When my little cousin Charlot was so ill at the Rue des Poissonniers, madame."

Gwynett caught the words, and then recollected that this was a young girl whom he had seen occasionally three years before when he was lodging in the house of one madame Dubut in Paris, and who had grown up to womanhood in the interval. The princesse, who was evidently not at all above gossiping with her dependents, looked at Gwynett with a little curiosity.

"I recollect something about that," she said. "So this is the healer by the laying-on of hands. You must explain your apostolic gift to my son," she added to Gwynett. "He is greatly interested in anything of that sort, and in a lot of other things which he had much better leave alone."

The regent asked for an explanation, which Gwynett, who was rather afraid of some absurd exaggeration, un-

dertook to give later on; and shortly afterwards the visitors took their leave.

"You may consider yourself in my mother's best books, chevalier," remarked the regent, as they drove back to the Palais-Royal. "It is not often I dare introduce any of my friends to her, even if they dare to be introduced. Her readiness to call a spade has been rather inconvenient in a court like ours. It might do very well in the Palatinate, where I fancy they are mostly very honest folk. Here, you see, we are all obliged to be liars, and most of us choose to be scoundrels as well—only we do not say so out loud. My mother does, and that shocks people. They say she has no manners."

The regent put his head out of the window at the moment, and bowed to the occupant of a carriage which they were passing.

"Lord Stair, confound him!" he muttered. "Coming to the Palais-Royal, no doubt. If you can invent some potion in our laboratory, chevalier, for turning Whigs into Jacobites, you will immensely oblige me. The way that excellent gentleman has pestered me for the last year about M. de St. George has been a nightmare, and now, of course, he will be worse than ever. Naturally, we have no prejudices in favor of the house of Hanover. But I, for one, am satisfied that it will be more trouble than it is worth to violate the treaty of Utrecht. Nevertheless, your lord Stair will have it that every mother's son of us is aiding and abetting the Pretender in a descent on Great Britain—which will be a pure farce, if it ever comes off. M. de St. George is not a William of Orange, whatever his friends in England may think."

The regent had scarcely alighted at the Palais-Royal when lord Stair's carriage followed into the courtyard, and the ambassador sent in to request an audience. The regent, who found a roomful of ministers and officials awaiting his return from St. Cloud, made a rueful grimace to M. de Tésu, his secretary, and went to receive the earl in his private cabinet.

"Monseigneur," said lord Stair, after the usual greetings had been exchanged, "permit me to express the extreme gratification with which my royal master will receive the news of your investment with the regency. I am en-

abled beforehand to assure you that this auspicious event will be regarded as a complete ratification of the terms of friendship now happily reigning between our respective countries."

"You are very good, milord," replied the regent, bowing. "I need scarcely say I reciprocate fully the sentiments you are charged to express on behalf of his majesty the king of England, and nothing will be wanting on the part of my government to show my solicitude for the maintenance of our good relations."

"I felt sure that such would be the case, monseigneur, and I am therefore emboldened to make a representation in connection with the state of affairs in Lorraine."

"Always the same story," groaned the regent to himself. "Well, milord," he proceeded aloud, "what has the duke been doing now?"

Leopold, duke of Lorraine and ancestor of the present Austrian house of Hapsburg-Lorraine, had been for some time the rather unwilling but very generous host of the chevalier de St. George. When the latter, in accordance with the treaty of Utrecht, had been obliged to withdraw from the French dominions proper, the duke had placed the château of Bar-le-duc at the Pretender's disposal, and had treated his guest with a degree of consideration and hospitality which had made a somewhat unfavorable impression at the court of St. James's. To remove this impression, Leopold had recently sent over to London a diplomatic agent in the person of a certain M. Lambertye.

"As to the duke," replied lord Stair, "we have nothing to complain about. His majesty was a little sore at first, and would not see M. Lambertye when he came over. But that was arranged satisfactorily, and the duke's explanations removed all difficulties."

"I saw M. Lambertye as he passed through Paris on his return to Nancy," said the regent. "I was very greatly interested in one result of his mission, which alone would have made his visit to England a circumstance of the first importance."

"What was that, monseigneur?" asked Stair, with a certain air of gratification.

"He brought back a new kind of potato," said the re-

gent. "I never tasted anything like it. He was good enough to give me a few seed-tubers, and I have two gardeners at Monceaux exclusively engaged in cultivating it. I wish every political mission resulted as fortunately."

Lord Stair was not always quite certain whether the duc d'Orléans was to be taken seriously or otherwise. So he ignored this excursion, and returned to his text.

"But, monseigneur, if we are satisfied with M. de Lorraine, it is quite otherwise with the people at Bar-le duc. Probably you are aware that the chevalier de St. George is constantly received by M. le prince de Vaudémont at Commercy. As we continue to receive assurances that a flight is contemplated, you will see that M. de Vandémont's action gives us double trouble. We have to keep watch not only over Bar-le-duc, but over the château de Commercy as well."

"Really, milord, I can scarcely see that we are concerned in all this. If we are to be held responsible for the society M. le chevalier selects in Lorraine, he might as well be in France again. We have to keep up St. Germain practically for nothing. The ex-queen of England makes very little use of it, and from what you say I almost think your government had better throw out the suggestion that M. le chevalier should return thither."

"Bless my soul, monseigneur!" exclaimed the ambassador, "that is not in the least what I had in view. What we want is your highness's active assistance in dealing with any evasion from Lorraine. M. de St. George must cross France to reach Havre——"

"Why Havre?" asked the regent innocently.

"We have it on the best authority that there are at least three or four ships with stores and arms collected there, awaiting the chevalier's arrival."

"That does not seem probable," replied the regent, who knew very well that Louis XIV. had provided the ships in question.

"Our information seems to be reliable, monseigneur. May we assume that your highness will order the discharge and detention of these munitions of war, on sufficient evidence being shown of their intended destination?"

"On sufficient evidence, certainly."

"I thank your highness. The matter is in the hands of

admiral Byng, who is cruising off Havre, and will probably furnish me with the necessary information in a few days. In the meantime, I hope we may rely on your highness's direct assistance in preventing any departure of M. de St. George from Bar-le-duc, or in intercepting him should he actually start."

"We will, of course, act upon any representation you may find yourself able to make, milord. But I venture to suggest that you should not attach too much importance to mere rumors, or even to any casual movements of M. le chevalier. He is rather a restless sort of person, and, like the rest of us, prefers to do exactly the reverse of what other people want him to do. For my own part, I often wonder king George does not insist on his living in London."

"Good heavens! monseigneur, of what are you talking?"

"I am talking of persuading the chevalier to remain in Lorraine. But of course you know best. Rely on us, in any case, to do all in our power to carry out our treaty obligations; and do me the favor to convey my sentiments of the highest consideration to his majesty the king of England."

The earl accepted this as a polite dismissal and went off rather better satisfied than he had been for some time past.

As soon as the door closed upon him, a very fine set of leather bindings, on half a dozen-bookshelves in a corner, swung out into the room, and the abbé Dubois emerged from behind.

"Well?" asked the regent.

"That is all right, so far," replied the abbé. "I only hope you will keep it up, monseigneur."

"Abbé, I tell you candidly I would send the fellow to the devil for two *sous*. It is not our business to play spy and bum-bailiff for these Hanover people."

"Monseigneur, grumble and swear to your heart's content, so long as you do what you are told."

"Abbé, your modesty and self-effacement almost bring tears into my eyes."

"If you are going to set up for a statesman, monseigneur, make me an archbishop and let me escape before you bring the whole world about your ears."

"You would look such a shocking scarecrow in a mitre, abbé, that I am afraid I shall have to leave things as they are."

"Monseigneur," said the abbé, at the door, "one is not obliged to wear a mitre, when one has a red hat in addition. I am sure your highness would be delighted to give that dear cardinal de Rohan a new colleague so much to his taste." And the abbé went out chuckling.

"I wonder where my worthy tutor intends to stop," mused the regent, as he returned to the council of ministers.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CONVERSATION AT ST. CYR.

THE three or four days following the famous sitting of the parliament of Paris were occupied by the regent in forming the various councils of state promised during the discussion upon the late king's will and codicil. Of these bodies it need only be mentioned that the marquis de Torcy was accorded a seat at the council of regency, that the duc de Noailles was placed at the head of the finances, and that maréchal de Berwick declined to form part of the council of war. *Per contra*, he requested a seat at the council of regency, which the duc d'Orléans, out of consideration for the susceptibilities of the English government, felt obliged to refuse.

At eight o'clock on Friday morning the regent drove out of Paris to call upon madame de Maintenon at her famous institution for young noblewomen at St. Cyr. This place had been the great hobby of the last thirty years of her life, and had been endowed by Louis XIV. to the amount of four hundred thousands livres a year. Thither its foundress had been in the habit of going at least every other day, and often as early as six o'clock in the morning, ever since its opening in 1682—doubtless finding the *rôle* of deputy-Providence to a couple of hundred adoring young ladies an agreeable change from the anxieties and annoyances of her equivocal position at Versailles.

As the regent approached the gates of the Maison de St. Louis, a couple of clerics emerged on foot, engaged in earnest conversation. One of these was père Tellier, and the other a thin, slight man with deep-seated, fiery eyes and an expression of extreme nervous excitability. The regent stopped his carriage, and saluted the royal confessor very politely.

"Still here, my dear père Tellier?" he asked the Jesuit, with a certain significance in his tone.

"As you see, monseigneur," replied the confessor defiantly. "And why not?"

"Only that you are worrying poor d'Argenson to death, mon père."

"I do not quite see how my proceedings can interest the lieutenant-general of police, monseigneur."

"Why, he is responsible for the safety of the public, mark you, and he expects every half-hour to hear of somebody slitting your windpipe. He knows that that would annoy me enormously."

"Monseigneur is very good to say so."

"Well, you see, people would probably assume it was done to please me; whereas, as you know, I wish you all health and prosperity."

"M. d'Argenson concerns himself quite needlessly about me, monseigneur."

"I hope it may turn out so. I think I have not the pleasure of knowing your friend."

The confessor frowned, and then introduced his companion.

"I have the honor," said he, "to present father Innis, confessor to M. le chevalier de St. George at Bar-le-duc."

The regent raised his hat.

"My dear father Innis," said he, "confer a favor on me by persuading our worthy père Tellier that the air of Bar-le-duc is a good deal more wholesome than that of Paris. You will do him a service also, unless I am very much mistaken."

"Where my duty is, I am, monseigneur," said père Tellier austere.

"Even in that case, mon père," observed the regent, "there is a convenience in not having one's throat cut."

"The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church," put in father Innis, with a little flourish.

"As you please, messieurs."

The regent saluted the two confessors, and signed to his coachman to go on into the courtyard. The priests resumed their walk in the direction of Paris.

Madame de Maintenon had been warned by madame de Caylus of the regent's probable visit, and was sitting with her friend and factotum mademoiselle d'Aumale when M. d'Orléans was announced. The companion was filled with

virtuous indignation at the intrusion of this atrocious representative of the male sex into the saintly atmosphere of the "Dames de St. Louis."

"Madame," she protested to the marquise, "it is simply a profanation. Let me persuade you to refuse to see M. d'Orléans."

"My dear friend, that will not help matters. M. d'Orléans has at all events the merit of candor, and he is probably in haste to announce the worst he has in store for us. It is well that we should know the worst, although, after the sacrileges of last Monday, I am prepared for anything."

"Does madame then think that St. Cyr is threatened?"

"My dear, as M. d'Orléans has been the mortal enemy of everything I hold sacred, it is easy to guess where he will strike his first blow. He knows that St. Cyr is the very apple of my eye. After St. Cyr, I myself must expect to be despoiled, to prevent my carrying on the work which we have brought to such perfection."

"Ah! madame," sighed the companion reverentially, "it will be a second Calvary for you to see St. Cyr suffer."

"I am resigned, as was our Master," observed the marquise, who found nothing unsuitable in mademoiselle d'Aumale's allusion. "Pray for me, my dear friend, that I may endure and forgive the injuries I am about to have heaped upon me."

The marquise went off to the plain little reception-room where the regent was waiting. The two antagonists saluted each other with great ceremony, and the marquise remained standing.

"This room is, perhaps, a little out of place for the regent of France, monseigneur," she said coldly. "But unfortunately we have no other in which we can suitably receive visitors."

"It is as good as most of those in the Bastille, madame," replied the regent cheerfully, "and I am quite satisfied with it as an alternative. Do me the favor to be seated. I hope I am not inconveniently early for you, but I thought it best to allow time for a leisurely discussion of the matters in which we are mutually interested."

The marquise sat down with the air of a hedgehog on guard,

"I am at your disposal, monseigneur, although I can scarcely imagine we have any interests in common."

The regent bowed, and seated himself opposite the marquise.

"Let us recall a little of the past, madame," he remarked blandly, "in order that we may better decide upon the footing on which we are to stand in the future."

The marquise inclined her head without speaking.

"It has happened, madame, that on more than one occasion you have done me the honor to take certain steps—or cause them to be taken—affecting my position and interests."

"Monseigneur, I have always endeavored to do my manifest duty, at whatever sacrifice of my own ease, leisure, or inclination."

"I am sure of it, madame. When you caused me to be recalled from my command in Spain, at a moment when my military successes were just upon the point of securing the expulsion of the Imperialist forces and the firm establishment of my cousin on his throne, I have no doubt you acted from motives of the highest consideration for my welfare. You probably reflected that further successes might make me conceited, and that it is injurious to a man to allow him to get conceited."

"Monseigneur, you probably know better than anyone else by what motives you were actuated while in command of the royal forces in Spain."

"Madame, if his late majesty and yourself sent me to Spain in order to lose battles, I am bound to say you carefully concealed your wishes. If my own stupidity prevented me from divining those wishes, I can very well imagine you were annoyed when I was so *mal à propos* as to keep on disregarding them."

The regent took a pinch of snuff, and continued,

"When I returned from Spain, my dear marquise, I was virtually exiled from court for three years. No one knows better than yourself that the atmosphere of Versailles is detrimental to the morals, and one can understand that you should desire to keep me out of temptation. Recognizing that, I have always felt very much indebted to you. Unfortunately the absent are always in the wrong, and I dare-

say, madame, you found it too troublesome to be continually defending me."

The marquise pressed her lips together, but made no reply.

"After that, madame, there occurred a series of deplorable fatalities in our family. The hand of death was busy with those who might have looked forward to wearing a crown. Doubtless it seemed natural to you, madame, to feel certain I had guided that hand."

"Why should you suppose it would seem natural, monseigneur?" asked the marquise icily.

"Eh! how should I know? Perhaps because when one finds a stone in one's path, one kicks it aside. If you never suspected, or suggested, or asserted anything of the sort, madame, of course I shall be delighted to hear it."

"I never accused you, monseigneur."

"That is a charming piece of news, madame. But how unlucky that all your friends fancied it would please you if they accused me! Let me see—was it not M. du Maine who wanted a *chambre ardente*? I forget."

"I have never pretended, monseigneur, that our court excelled in thinking no evil."

"*Pardieu!* no. They used to gossip abominably about the death of poor M. de Louvois, as I daresay you recollect—and all because he was understood to have violently opposed the king's intended announcement of his marriage with yourself, madame."

"These are atrocious calumnies, monseigneur," said the marquise, turning a little pale.

"Of course," assented the regent. "But when M. de Louvois' physician committed suicide in an agony of remorse, after raving about some crime or other he had been persuaded to commit in order to gratify somebody's spite, you could hardly expect people not to chatter."

The marquise made no reply, but became paler than before.

"At the same time," proceeded the regent, "all that is not my business. But decidedly, madame, your methods of showing your good will towards me have of late been surprisingly obscure. If I were not convinced of the contrary, I should almost suppose that the king's will and

codicil had been designed to place me at some little disadvantage. What do you think, madame?"

The marquise was rather slow in finding an answer. Then she replied,

"You may rest assured, monseigneur, that in the arrangements that he made his majesty was guided by no considerations but those of the welfare of the monarchy."

"I have no doubt of it, madame. But it is possible that the ideas of his majesty and—say—of M. du Maine, with regard to the welfare of the monarchy, might have differed a little. If his majesty had any personal conviction that the welfare of the monarchy required me to be put in the Bastille, or got out of the way even more effectively still, he took a good deal of pains to prevent my being aware of it. And in any case, madame, it is needless to say I should have disagreed with that conviction. Hence the proceedings of last Monday, which I fear may have disappointed you somewhat."

"Since his majesty's death, monseigneur, I have absolutely nothing to do with the court, the government, or the world; and you mistake very much if you assume the contrary."

"I am surprised and grieved to hear it, madame—all the more because I came here assuming, as you say, the contrary, and hoping to be able to arrange something on that understanding."

The marquise looked a trifle disconcerted at this announcement, and replied,

"I have not refused to listen to anything that you have to say, monseigneur."

"You are very good, madame. I will, then, trespass upon your attention for a moment while I explain to you the position in which I find myself."

The regent helped himself again to snuff, paused a second or two, and then went on,

"You will understand, madame, that while I myself am prepared to see nothing but good will and consideration in the various little circumstances to which I have alluded, it is otherwise with my friends and advisers. I need not tell you that the burden of sovereignty borne so long and so ably by his late majesty is one altogether too heavy for me, and that I shall therefore have to rely implicitly on

the aid of the ministers and councillors who will have the honor of serving our youthful monarch in their various capacities."

As this exordium did not enlighten the marquise, she listened in silence.

"It grieves me much, madame," continued the regent, "to have to say that the gentlemen who constitute the different councils of state, and by whose advice I shall feel bound to act in future, entertain very strong ideas with regard to yourself and M. du Maine, and to père Tellier—not to speak of various other people. They say, for instance, that you have all done your utmost to injure my position, to deprive me of my rights, and to jeopardize even my personal safety, that you are enraged at your failure to grasp the reins of government, and that if you are at liberty there will not be an hour of the day or night that will not be occupied by intrigues and conspiracies to undermine my authority and oust me from the regency. And they insist that I should nip all this in the bud by sequestering your income and property, exiling père Tellier, and clapping M. du Maine in the Bastille. Shocking, is it not?"

The marquise maintained an impassive countenance. But the watchful regent glanced at the hands folded upon her knee, and saw the knuckles suddenly whiten.

"It appears to me, monseigneur," she said, "that you are as badly advised by your new ministers as by your old boon companions."

"Perhaps you are right, madame. But I can assure you they argue the thing very well—very well indeed. For instance MM. d'Argenson and de Noailles, who are to deal with our police and our finances, pull deplorably long faces over M. du Maine and over your old allowance of four thousand livres a month."

"I do not see the connection," observed the marquise curtly.

"It is quite simple," replied the regent suavely. "It seems our finances are in a frightful mess. According to de Noailles, we could only just manage to carry on before his majesty's death. And now M. d'Argenson wants another four thousand livres a month—just the amount of your allowance, you will perceive—for police expenses to

keep watch on M. du Maine. You see, he takes it for granted that M. du Maine will not fail to conspire against me, and he has further the idea that you will supply him with funds for the purpose. So he insists upon putting these funds to what he calls their proper use, in defending his majesty's government against intriguers and conspirators."

"So, then, monseigneur, I am to be despoiled because M. d'Argenson chooses to invent intrigues and conspiracies?"

"You think it is all invention, madame?"

"I am sure of it, monseigneur."

"I wish I could convince d'Argenson of that. But you know he is an obstinate fellow. It will take all my time to keep M. du Maine out of the Bastille, I can see, unless his friends can get him to be reasonable. One can hardly expect that, perhaps—eh, madame?"

The marquise seemed for a second or two to be making some sort of inward struggle. Finally she remarked, with a slight change of tone in her voice,

"I need scarcely say, monseigneur, that any little influence I may possess will be exerted, as a matter of course, in the direction of persuading M. du Maine to respect the decision of the parliament of Paris—a decision to which I understand he was, in effect, a consenting party. Any other course would, in my opinion, be as unjustifiable as unwise."

"M. d'Argenson will hear your views with great relief, madame, I feel certain. Where he would have to get his extra four thousand livres a month, in case M. du Maine disregarded your advice, I am sure I don't know. It is a very awkward thing to find his majesty's coffers so empty. Still, I hope M. de Noailles will see his way, in spite of M. d'Argenson, to continue your usual allowance. If not, I venture to trust, madame, that I have made clear my own wishes in the matter, and that you will not lay at my door any little inconveniences that may result from M. du Maine choosing to perpetrate some *bêtise* or other."

The regent rose as if to terminate the conversation, and the marquise followed his example.

"*A propos*, madame," said he, as he moved towards the door, "if you see père Tellier again, convey to him the as-

surance of my profound consideration. and of my anxiety about his health."

"He is quite well, I believe," said the marquise, looking a little surprised.

"Indeed?" replied the regent negligently. "Someone was saying that the air of Paris was not good for him just now. A mistake, probably. I have the honor to wish you a good morning, madame—unless, by the way, you will be so obliging as to present me to some of your charming *protégées*."

The regent made this suggestion with the air of proposing the most natural thing in the world, and the marquise gave a visible shudder.

"That would be against our rules, monseigneur."

"What a pity!" lamented the regent, with perfect gravity. "Tell them from me, madame, that I have their welfare at heart, and that there is no true happiness except in the path of virtue."

The regent passed out into the entrance hall, and remarked, as he stopped to look around,

"Let me see—the income assigned to St. Cyr is four hundred thousand livres a year, is it not, madame?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"So de Noailles said," murmured the regent, half to himself. "There is no doubt the duke will make a sharp financier."

This aside disturbed the marquise more than all the rest of the conversation.

"Monseigneur," she said hastily, "it would be sacrilege to touch a revenue dedicated to heaven."

"Just what I have said to M. de Noailles, madame," replied the regent, in a candid tone. "You see, it is the worst of these new brooms that sometimes they want to sweep too clean. Still, it is a good fault. At the same time, there is nothing decided—that is, in the way of making any change."

The marquise, somewhat reassured, attended the regent to the door. Arrived there, she paused a moment, and then remarked, with the perfunctory air of a person who endeavors to discharge an unwelcome obligation,

"Permit me to say, monseigneur, that you are perhaps

looking in the wrong direction for a disturber of the security of your government."

"Ah! You think that, marquise? And where should I look, then?"

The marquise glanced cautiously around, and said slowly,

"If I undertake to answer for M. du Maine, monseigneur, it is not so with madame la duchesse. You must deal with her yourself, and I advise you to take some precautions in that quarter."

The regent bowed, and kissed his fingers to some invisible personage.

"I see I shall have to make love to madame du Maine," he said. "Adieu, madame—I shall retain a charming recollection of our most agreeable interview."

The regent entered his carriage and drove away, while madame de Maintenon returned to mademoiselle d'Aumale.

"Ah! madame," cried the companion, "what an ordeal! What are the monsters going to do?"

"Pooh!" said the marquise curtly, "nothing is going to be done, mademoiselle, that I am aware of. When there is, I will inform you of it."

CHAPTER IX.

NO LO MARTYRARI.

ABOUT a mile from the Paris barrier the regent's coachman turned round upon his seat, and remarked,

"Pardon, monseigneur, but there is a great crowd coming this way. They are pursuing some fugitives."

"Draw the carriage across the road," replied the regent. "I suppose one will be expected to assist at this sort of thing," he muttered to himself, "although it is a deplorable departure from all my principles."

In a couple of minutes the crowd, shouting and flinging missiles, could be seen chasing before them two men in clerical garb, whose clothes were bespattered with mud and whose faces were bleeding. The fugitives, panting and almost exhausted, reached the carriage, and one of them cried,

"Help, monseigneur! or this *canaille* will murder us before your eyes!"

"Is it possible!" ejaculated the regent. "Father Innis—and père Tellier, too! Keep close to the carriage, messieurs, I beg of you, while my servants try to temper the enthusiasm of your followers."

The regent ordered his two mounted grooms to advance and keep back the crowd, which was done without much difficulty when the regent was recognized. Then he turned to the two clerics.

"What has happened, messieurs?" he asked urbanely, "and what can I do for you?"

Father Innis was the first to reply.

"We were attacked by this mob ten minutes ago, monseigneur, and have barely escaped with our lives. You will, I hope, give us the protection of your carriage?"

"Of course—such as it is. But unfortunately, as you see,

I have too small an escort to prevent the mob taking you out of the carriage on our way to Paris and hanging you, if they have a mind that way. On the other hand, if you run away towards Versailles, some of them will probably overtake you."

Père Tellier maintained a vengeful silence, and glared at the murmuring crowd, which increased every moment. But father Innis continued to implore the regent's protection.

"Surely, monseigneur, they will not venture to attack your equipage or your escort?" he said.

"Do you mind leaving the matter in my hands, mon-sieur?" asked the regent.

"How can you ask, monseigneur? Do whatever you please, only save us from these tigers," exclaimed the Jacobite.

The regent alighted from the carriage, and advanced towards the fringe of the mob, which was beginning to hustle the two grooms and their horses. He was received with loud cheers.

"Gentlemen," said he, raising his hat, "What do you want with these two persons you are running after?"

A chorus of execrations rose in reply.

"It is the Jesuit! Down with Tellier! The black coats *à la lanterne!*" was yelled on all sides.

"Gentlemen," proceeded the regent, "I am sure you do not wish to disoblige me."

"Vive monseigneur le régent!" was the pretty unanimous reply.

"Very good. Now I don't suppose that père Tellier has done any of you any harm, whereas he is my bitterest enemy, as most of you know."

"We know it! Down with the Jesuit!" roared the crowd.

"Certainly," replied the regent. "But, gentlemen, as I have a crow to pluck with père Tellier on my own account, I hope you will not spoil sport by interfering."

The crowd cheered without exactly understanding, and the regent turned to the two grooms.

"Take a piece of rope and bind those two fellows hand and foot," he called out loudly.

This was promptly done, and the two priests, secured by a dozen yards of cord and a multitude of knots, were placed by the regent's further orders, in the front seat of

the carriage. These proceedings were vociferously applauded, and as the grooms resumed their position in front of the carriage the crowd surged round the equipage to jeer at the prisoners. The regent took his seat, signed to the coachman to start, and shouted in stentorian tones,

“To the Bastille!”

A roar of applause followed, the mob parted right and left, and the carriage set off at full speed for the barrier.

“Gentlemen,” said the regent, as soon as the crowd was left behind, “accept my apologies for my method of getting rid of your assailants. It was the only one that occurred to me at the moment. But if it fails to meet with your approval, do not hesitate to say so, and I will put you in the road again.”

“On the contrary, monseigneur,” replied père Tellier stiffly, “we are indebted to you for the stratagem you have employed.”

“I need not say, gentlemen, that I will take you wherever you please. If a sojourn in the Bastille will serve any purpose of yours, you have only to say so.”

“Holy Virgin!” exclaimed father Innis, in alarm, “you are not serious, monseigneur?”

“It might have the appearance of a little persecution, my dear father Innis, if you are seeking such a thing. I understood you to say this morning that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church. From that point of view, I confess I am a little surprised that both of you should make such a fuss about being murdered by our friends yonder. Why should you object? Everybody would know that père Tellier, at all events, owed his lamented end to the thoroughness with which he had done his duty. With what *éclat* you would both have departed this life! especially as our Holy Church has been deplorably short of effective martyrs lately. It is surely a pity that the Protestants should be able to brag of their forty or fifty thousand ‘slaughtered saints’ and that we should shirk providing even a couple of royal confessors. Do you not think so, père Tellier?”

“I have not your highness’s proficiency in jesting,” replied the Jesuit sourly.

“Jesting!” returned the regent, “I was never more serious—so much so that I begin already to regret my ill-

advised interference. How it would have covered the Société de Jésus with glory to have one of its chiefs butchered for conscience' sake! Hitherto, you see, you have done all the butchering yourself, mon père, and people find nothing particularly saintly in that. I am afraid we shall all look a little ridiculous, as it is. For myself, I do not mind. But it is distressing to have to exhibit you to the populace of Paris trussed like a couple of fowls, and blue with fright. Will you not, on second thoughts, go back and be martyred? You will cut a much better figure, one would think."

Father Innis grinned a ghastly smile at this suggestion, and père Tellier looked sourer than before. But neither of the two confessors seemed disposed to qualify for canonization at this particular juncture, and the carriage proceeded on its way to the Palais-Royal.

Driving through Paris, the coachman made very slow progress, but he explained this by saying that one of the horses had sprained itself when the carriage was drawn across the road. Thus the two confessors, amidst the regent's continual laments and apologies, were a good deal on view, and their appearance provoked amusement and amazement along the whole of the route.

Arrived at the Palais-Royal, the regent had his companions unbound and offered them the hospitality of the palace. This père Tellier declined with the best grace at his command, and went away with his colleague, under the protection of a couple of the Garde Royale. They directed their steps to the lodging of the Jacobite, dismissed their escort with thanks, and went indoors to remove the outward and visible signs of their recent adventure.

Père Tellier stood before a mirror and surveyed his muddy and blood-smeared countenance with a sardonic smile. Then he turned to Father Innis, and remarked,

"My dear friend, I was wrong and you are right. It is clear there is nothing to be done under this accursed regency. The work of thirty years destroyed in a moment by an infidel, a libertine, and a buffoon! Satan is certainly loose again. But, as you say justly, England opens its arms to us. We will set off to-night for Bar-le-duc."

"I rejoice that we shall have your invaluable aid," observed the Jacobite, who was sponging his nose over a

basin. "Still more that I have been the instrument of securing it."

"Honor to whom honor," replied père Tellier. "It was not your arguments, my dear friend, but the last shower of brickbats, that did the business. I found that convincing enough, I assure you."

"Thus good comes out of evil," philosophized the Jacobite, as he carefully placed a piece of sticking-plaster across the bridge of his nose.

* * * * *

In the evening the regent went to pay a short visit to madame de Valincour, and found her busy with the abbé Dubois.

"Comtesse," said he, "you may, if you like, get up a little song of Miriam about me, for I have triumphed gloriously. If I have not cast the horse and his rider into the sea, I have at least upset the ass and his drivers into the mud."

"Which drivers, monseigneur?" asked the comtesse.

"The two chief ones—the rest are hardly worth troubling about. On Monday, as you know, we managed to make M. du Maine a dry-nurse instead of a dictator. To-day I have converted la Scarron into a wet blanket, and père Tellier into a scare-crow."

"Let us hear the details, monseigneur."

"I went to St. Cyr this morning, and persuaded madame de Maintenon, in return for forty-eight thousand livres a year to prevent M. du Maine from conspiring against me."

"Rather an expensive precaution, monseigneur," grumbled the abbé. "I hope you will not have wasted your money."

"My money? It was her money—I do not see how one could bribe more cheaply than that."

"Ah!" said the comtesse. "Then you threatened her with the loss of her allowance if M. du Maine gives any trouble?"

"I daresay my remarks might be twisted into something of the sort. In addition, I fancy she derived the impression that de Noailles would be rather glad of an excuse to sequester the endowment of St. Cyr. We parted on quite affectionate terms—so much so, that she warned me that the duchesse was not so much under her thumb as M. du Maine."



"There is a good deal in that," said Dubois.

"And about père Tellier?" asked the comtesse.

The regent narrated the circumstances of his meeting with the two confessors, and their subsequent entry into Paris.

"My coachman managed rather cleverly," he went on. "You would have thought the horses were all dead lame as we crawled along the Rue St. Honoré. Everyone could get a view of père Tellier, as he sat looking like what they call a Guy Fawkes over in England."

"What was father Innis doing in Paris?" asked the comtesse.

"Probably trying to persuade père Tellier to join M. de St. George, who is welcome to him. I only hope nobody will be so idiotic as to do him a mischief before he sets off. That would put him on a pedestal again. As it is, folks will not be able to speak to him for laughing."

"It seems to me, monseigneur, that your way of revenging yourself is at least as good as other people's," remarked the comtesse.

"I wish I could enjoy being vindictive," said the regent, taking up his hat. "It must be a great pleasure. My mother used to say that at my birth the fairies endowed me with all the talents except that of making use of them, which was omitted by some spiteful imp who had not been invited to the ceremony. I suppose that accounts for my deficiency."

"And what will you do with madame du Maine?"

"Really I am at a loss there. If I could get her to one of my suppers I should die happy. That, by the way, reminds me that I am late already. So *au revoir*, comtesse."

The regent went away, leaving Dubois and madame de Valincour to continue their conference. The abbé sat in silence for a while, and then remarked to his companion,

"Monseigneur managed pretty well at St. Cyr, comtesse?"

"From his point of view, doubtless," replied madame de Valincour.

"And from yours, comtesse?"

"From mine, abbé, it appears that the sooner we entirely undo what monseigneur has done, the better."

"How, madame?"

"Clearly, abbé, if anything comes of the interview this morning, it will be that the du Maines will be kept quiet."

"*Certes*. Is not that rather desirable? We are not absolutely out of the wood yet, and it is no use expecting monseigneur to cut down any of the trees."

"Abbé, if we were merely seeking peace and quietness, that would be an argument. But we are not."

"Granted, comtesse. But what of that?"

"It is quite simple, abbé. You and I are still agreed upon our policy of an alliance with England and a war of conquest against Spain?"

"Assuredly—when we can pick a quarrel there. But that will not be easy just at present."

"Exactly—hence the utility of M. du Maine."

"Explain, comtesse."

"Do you suppose, abbé, that king Philippe is satisfied to be excluded from his right to the French succession, supposing the little king were to die?"

"Not he."

"And the little king is very likely to die?"

"Very likely, I imagine."

"Good. It is admitted that M. du Maine is too remote to think of the crown, although he is quite a possible regent."

"Without doubt."

"And king Philippe detests M. d'Orléans as heartily as M. du Maine does?"

"More, one would fancy—seeing that M. d'Orléans came pretty close to being at the Escorial instead of his cousin."

"Naturally, then, king Philippe would prefer M. du Maine as regent, while waiting for the little king's possible death and his own succession to the throne of France?"

"In spite of his renunciation and the treaty of Utrecht, comtesse?"

"Pooh! abbé, where would king Philippe be now, if people kept treaties any longer than they chose? Let us look things in the face. What would be more natural than a conspiracy between M. du Maine and king Philippe to oust M. d'Orléans from the regency and put M. du Maine in his place, with the understanding that if Louis XV. dies, M. du Maine shall proclaim Philippe king of France in spite of the renunciation, and shall himself be left in power

as viceroy in case Philippe finds it better to remain at Madrid?"

"That would be a surprisingly good idea. But I am satisfied that there is no such conspiracy—as yet."

"Precisely, abbé—as yet."

"Well, comtesse?"

"Therefore, abbé, there must be one—and as soon as possible."

"A conspiracy against monseigneur?"

"Of course."

"And why, comtesse?"

"Because there are three inestimable advantages to be gained by it. In the first place, to detect a conspiracy against the regent will enormously strengthen his position—and one can always detect conspiracies of one's own arranging; secondly, it will provide an excellent ground for extinguishing M. du Maine; and thirdly—which is vital to our programme—it would not only put us at daggers drawn with Spain, but afford the amplest justification for a *guerre à l'outrance* with her."

The abbé stroked his chin reflectively.

"And you therefore conclude, comtesse, that M. du Maine should be allowed to conspire?"

"More than that, abbé. He must not only be allowed, but encouraged—and if the ideas we have been discussing are not in his head already, or the duchesse's, they must be put there."

"By whom?"

"What a question! Am I to feed you with a spoon, abbé?"

"You are quite right, comtesse. I am never ashamed to learn, and I confess you have a knack of teaching that astonishes me."

"Then you agree with me?"

"Entirely, comtesse."

Madame de Valincour mused for a minute, and then resumed,

"Recollect above all things, abbé, that while we are on good terms with Spain, you and I are hanging on the breath of the little king. But from the moment we are at war with the only other descendant of Louis XIV., Louis

XV. may die as soon as he pleases—for M. d'Orléans will then be the sole possible king of France."

"That is very true," said the abbé, taking up his papers.

"And by the way, abbé," added the comtesse in conclusion, "monseigneur may as well be allowed to remain under the impression that he did something clever at St. Cyr this morning. There is no use in making people dissatisfied with themselves for nothing."

The abbé rose, and nodded in acquiescence. Then he waved his hand by way of adieu, opened the door, and went away very thoughtfully.

CHAPTER X.

A VISIT TO THE BASTILLE.

AS the Versailles physicians objected with one voice to the inconvenience which would be entailed upon them by the little king's removal to Vincennes, the regent decided to rely on the advice of the court doctors from Paris, to whom the transfer was a matter of indifference. These gentlemen at once obediently discovered that the air of Versailles was not sufficiently bracing for a weakly child. So on Monday the royal household was transferred to the château of Vincennes, the king travelling in company with his gouvernante madame de Ventadour, the regent, the duc du Maine, and maréchal Villeroi.

Early the following morning the regent, accompanied by M. de Torcy, went to the laboratory, where Gwynett was busy with the still incomplete alterations. The marquis greeted him with his usual cordiality, and the regent, after inspecting the progress that had been made, inquired.

"May I ask, M. de Starhemberg, if you happen ever to have been in the Bastille?"

"No, monseigneur."

"Nor I, so far. Would you care to accompany us on a visit of inspection we are paying this morning?"

"If I were sure of recovering my appetite within a reasonable time, monseigneur, I should be very much interested to see the place—or at all events one cell there. I believe it is known as the fourth Bazinière."

"Why that one in particular, chevalier?"

"A friend of mine spent seventeen years in it, monseigneur."

"*Diable!* what became of him?"

"He escaped, between three and four years ago. Rather unfortunately, as things turned out."

"Monseigneur," remarked de Torcy, "there is a very curious story connected with the circumstances to which M.

de Starhemberg alludes. Some day or other you might ask the chevalier to tell it you."

"By all means, chevalier," said the regent. "And no time like the present, if you are willing."

Gwynett looked a little doubtfully at M. de Torcy, and asked,

"Are you satisfied that that would be altogether discreet, M. le marquis?"

"So much so, chevalier," replied the marquis significantly, "that I think you may be quite explicit on all the details with which you are acquainted. As to the earlier part of the affair, I can perhaps say something about that myself, afterwards."

As M. de Torcy evidently considered the regent would be not only a safe but possibly a useful confidant of his adventures, Gwynett at once told the story of his former visit to France and its disastrous sequel—to all of which the regent listened with the greatest interest.

"Really, chevalier," he remarked at the close, "if I were not convinced to the contrary, I should suspect you to be a colleague of our worthy M. Galland. Certainly your adventures would figure quite respectably in another volume of the Arabian fables he has been foisting upon us the last ten years.* I need not say your confidence shall be respected absolutely—unless, by the way, I can use any influence to put matters straight for you. As soon as I am a little firmer in the saddle, I should like to get a revision of your sentence from the English government—or a pardon, as they seem to call it over there. That is, if you have no objection."

"On the contrary," replied Gwynett, bowing. "But I need not point out, monseigneur, a failure would be as annoying to you as it would be inconvenient to myself."

"We must manage not to fail. It will only be a question of putting salt on milord Stair's tail, and we shall do that before long, I have no doubt."

Arrived at the Bastille, the regent and his party were

* "The Thousand and One Nights" (popularly known as "The Arabian Nights") were first translated and published by Antoine Galland in Paris, between 1704 and 1717, in twelve volumes 12mo, and were denounced by most other Orientalists as spurious.

received by the governor, M. de Bernaville, and conducted over the second drawbridge into the château, where the lieutenant-du-roi made his appearance. Asking after the fourth Bazinière, Gwynett learnt that, owing to a case of illness of some duration, the usual occupant of the cell had been provided with a companion. At the regent's suggestion they went up to the cell, which was at the moment empty, thanks to its being the hour for prisoners taking their exercise on the parapet at the top of the walls. Gwynett examined with keen interest the surroundings amongst which its previous tenant had spent so many years, and was filled with wonder at the vigor of mind and body which had survived such an ordeal almost unimpaired.

After leaving the cell the party adjourned to the council-chamber in the cross-wing between the two towers called the "Chapelle" and the "Liberté," and the regent inquired about the two prisoners in the fourth Bazinière.

"One is rather a recent arrival here," replied the lieutenant-du-roi. "But his companion, whom we put there to join him a few weeks back, is our *doyen*. I do not know exactly how long he has been here, but certainly he is our oldest inhabitant. He used to be in the *calotte*, but he became rheumatic, and we put him with No. 4."

"I will see these two men," said the regent, as he seated himself at the council-table. "After that I fear I shall make myself a nuisance, M. le lieutenant—I am going to ask you for the *letters de cachet* of all your lodgers."

"It will take some time, monseigneur," replied the lieutenant, with rather a languid air.

"Not if you get all your staff to help you," returned the regent, in a tone which told the lieutenant he had made a mistake. "There is nothing I detest more than being kept waiting."

The lieutenant disappeared instantly, and the regent turned to de Bernaville, who was giving Gwynett a few details about the former occupant of the fourth Bazinière.

"What is the total annual allowance for the keep of your delightful lodging-house, my dear governor?" he asked.

M. de Bernaville calculated for a few seconds, and then replied rather reluctantly,

"Probably about a hundred and forty thousand livres, on an average, monseigneur."

"*Peste!*" muttered the regent half to himself, "that is a good deal to pay for making three or four dozen poor devils uncomfortable. One could be spiteful more cheaply than that, I should imagine."

"Monseigneur," put in de Bernaville hastily, "our expenses are very heavy, as you are doubtless aware. And some of our prisoners require to be treated with great consideration."

"No doubt," said the regent. "For instance, what would M. du Maine have paid you to take care of me, if things had gone the other way on Monday week?"

"Really, monseigneur——" stammered the governor.

"Pooh! don't affect modesty, my dear M. de Bernaville. I suppose you have a tariff for folks of my sort?"

"Monseigneur, the allowance for princes of the blood is fifty livres a day."

"And you would have made me comfortable and fed me decently?"

"From my own table, monseigneur—and I have an excellent chef. Ask M. de Torcy."

"I attest his abilities with enthusiasm," replied de Torcy, "although I have only once had the opportunity of forming an opinion about them. It was that very night," he added in an aside to Gwynett.

"Heavens!" ejaculated the regent, "and all this for fifty livres a day?"

"Certainly, monseigneur."

The regent threw himself back in his chair with the air of a man who has made up his mind.

"And it costs me a couple of thousand at the Palais-Royal! My major-domo must be the biggest thief in Europe, or out of it. I will hang him the minute I get back, and you shall have his place, my dear M. de Bernaville—that is settled. It is quite clear your talents are utterly wasted here."

At this moment the lieutenant entered with a handful of papers, which he laid upon the table before the regent. These were *lettres de cachet*.

"Here are some to go on with, monseigneur," he said. "But they are, of course, the most recent—we have not yet got at those of the fourth Bazinière."

The regent turned over a dozen of the orders. Nine out of the twelve were countersigned by the chancellor Voysin.

"Hm!" said he. "For Voysin, read père Tellier. Let us see."

He looked through the nine *lettres de cachet* and then passed them over to de Torcy.

"What did I tell you?" he asked. "These are all for heresy, blasphemy, and attacks on religion. That means that they have been making themselves unpleasant to père Tellier and his colleagues."

The marquis looked at the orders, and replied,

"In two or three cases, certainly—I recollect some lampoons. Possibly in the others also."

"M. le lieutenant," said the regent, "bring in all these gentlemen, one after the other."

This order was promptly carried out, the persons named being one after the other brought into the council-chamber, and questioned by the regent. It appeared that in all the nine cases the cause of imprisonment was the same—namely, that the prisoners had satirized or denounced or actively opposed the court influence of the Jesuit faction.

As soon as the list was gone through and the last case dealt with, the regent ordered all the prisoners to be introduced in a body.

"Gentlemen," said he to them, "I daresay you have all deserved, like the rest of us, to be put in the Bastille for something or other. But your nominal offence does not strike me as being very heinous, and his majesty cannot afford the expense of maintaining you merely to please madame la marquise de Maintenon and some of her friends. If I turn you all into the street, can you find supper and lodging for to-night?"

"Certainly, monseigneur," cried the astonished culprits with one voice.

"Very well," said the regent. "M. de Bernaville, in spite of the long face he is pulling, will open the door for you, and you can be off as soon as you choose. I notice with regret that the cut of your clothes is a little behind the

fashion, which is perhaps natural. If you will call upon M. le duc de Noailles to-morrow morning at the Treasury, he will hand you five hundred livres each towards a new wardrobe—but on one condition.”

“Name it, monseigneur,” said the senior prisoner, as spokesman for the rest.

“It is simply, gentlemen, that none of you will go and do a mischief to père Tellier while he remains in Paris. Otherwise you will earn for me a reputation for being spiteful, which would annoy me very much. As to what may happen at Bar-le-duc, or elsewhere, I don’t care a *sou*.”

“You may rely on us, monseigneur, and accept our most grateful thanks,” replied the prisoners.

The regent bowed and waved his hand.

“I am rather busy,” he said. “M. de Bernaville, will you be so good as to hand these gentlemen their belongings, and dismiss them? Adieu, messieurs.”

The governor rose with a depressed air, and accompanied the released prisoners out of the room. The regent made some notes from the orders, and jotted down a row of figures.

“There go forty-five thousand livres of expense per annum,” he remarked. “I am sure, M. de Torcy, you will admit my administration of justice promises to be economical.”

“If this goes on,” replied the marquis, “poor de Bernaville will be a pauper before dinner-time. Nevertheless, you have probably made a few friends, monseigneur.”

“I wish I could think so. But I rather fancy that when these gentlemen get outside, it will occur to them that in common fairness I ought to have given them a thousand livres each instead of five hundred. Then they will go round Paris telling everybody I have robbed them of the balance.”

The lieutenant-du-roi here entered with some more orders.

“These two, monseigneur,” he said, presenting a couple, “are those of the two prisoners in the fourth Bazinière, which you asked for specially—Petroni and Grivois.”

“Which is the elder?”

“Petroni, monseigneur.”

The regent ran his eye over the document.

"Pietro Petroni, Italian, aged thirty," he murmured. "Dated 1680."

"Thirty-five years!" ejaculated Gwynett. "Why he has spent more than half his life here. What was his offence, monseigneur?"

"There is none mentioned," replied the regent. "Phelipeaux countersigns, I see. What does your register say about this prisoner, M. le lieutenant?"

"Nothing, monseigneur. I took care to look up that entry, before bringing you the order."

"Any other particulars about him?"

"None, monseigneur, except that he was brought from Marseilles."

"Let us have him here and do me the favor to inquire amongst the staff if anyone has ever heard anything of his offence."

The old prisoner was brought in and saluted the party with an air of calm indifference. He had still the dark complexion of the south, but his hair and patriarchal beard were snow-white.

"You have been here a long time, M. Petroni?" said the regent.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Why were you brought here?"

"I have not the slightest idea, monseigneur."

"What was your offence?"

"I never knew."

"How were you arrested?"

"I was a wine-merchant in a small way at Hyères. One day I took some casks of wine to Marseilles in my felucca. I went to a *cabaret* to dine. There the police arrested me, and took me off to jail. After a week or two, I was brought here. They never told me why."

"You must have done something or other to get yourself into trouble."

"Impossible, monseigneur. I was always an honest man. I attended to my business, and meddled with nothing else."

"Had you any enemies?"

"I knew of none."

The lieutenant-du-roi here entered and informed the

regent that nothing whatever was known or reported about the prisoner's history or offence.

"That was the time of the '*chambre ardente*' on the La Voysin affair," remarked the regent to de Torcy. "I suppose there has been some idiotic blunder."

The marquis nodded, and the regent sat in silence for a minute or two, with an unusual frown on his forehead. He looked again at the *lettre de cachet*, and then said to the prisoner, with a return to his wonted nonchalance,

"It appears to me, M. Petroni, that some little apology is due to you. If there ever was any reason for your being in this place, which I very much doubt, nobody seems to have taken the trouble to mention it. Whoever put you here most likely went away and forgot all about it—which was rude. It may console you to reflect that by this time he is probably dead and in that case is doubtless more or less uncomfortable. Let us hope so. In the meantime, if there is anything we can do for you, besides setting you free, you will confer a favor on me by naming it."

The prisoner looked rather alarmed at the last sentence, and stammered,

"Set me free, monseigneur?"

"At once, M. Petroni."

"But I shall die of starvation, monseigneur."

"Certainly that shall not happen, my friend. We will send you back to your native place, if you wish. You have relatives and friends, no doubt, whom you will be glad to see again."

"If they are not all dead, monseigneur, they will long ago have forgotten me."

"I suppose you had some property at Hyères?"

"It will have been divided thirty years since among my heirs. They will not thank me for coming back."

"I suppose you have no friends in France?"

"Not one, monseigneur."

The regent mused a little and then asked,

"What, then, are your wishes, M. Petroni?"

"Can you not leave me where I am, monseigneur? I am too old to get accustomed to fresh places or fresh people."

The regent gulped something down his throat, and

looked half reproachfully at de Torcy. The marquis understood him, and replied hastily,

"Monseigneur, it is some little satisfaction to me to recollect that I have never countersigned a *lettre de cachet*."

"And I have been told my uncle signed about nine thousand while he reigned. It is damnable. We shall all pay for this some day," added the regent prophetically. Then he turned to de Bernaville, and said,

"My dear governor, you will receive M. Petroni as my guest, and treat him as a prince of the blood. Give him everything he asks for, and let him go to and fro, or in and out, exactly as he pleases. Will that meet with your approval, M. Petroni?" he asked of the prisoner.

"Monseigneur is very good," replied Petroni, who was apparently only able to realize that he would not be disturbed.

"Have you any other request to make, my friend?"

The old man looked dubiously towards the governor, and then said slowly,

"Monseigneur, there is a gentleman in the same room with me——"

"Well?"

"He has been very kind to me, especially once or twice when I was far from well. If monseigneur would set him free, I am sure he would be thankful—although I shall be sorry to lose his company."

"Jules Grivois," put in the lieutenant-du-roi, handing an order to the regent. "He has been here about three years."

"What for?"

"As a matter of fact," said de Bernaville, with a discreet smile, "he was in the household of M. du Maine, and there was some gossip about madame la duchesse."

"That sounds promising," chuckled the regent. "Bring him here. If we can do nothing more for you, M. Petroni, I will say good morning to you, and trust the remainder of your stay here will be entirely to your liking."

The old man thanked the regent with a very relieved expression of countenance, and bowed himself out. Of his subsequent career, history unfortunately says nothing.

His companion was next introduced into the council-chamber. M. Jules Grivois was a gentlemanly man of about forty, with a little of the swagger of a soldier, and a good deal of the air of a court lickspittle.

"You have been here three years, M. Grivois?"

"I have not kept count exactly, monseigneur?"

"You are aware of your offence?"

"No. But I can guess."

The regent smiled.

"We hear you have done some little kindness to your companion in No. 4, when he has been ill."

"So he says. As a matter of fact, the poor devil's groans kept me awake, and I nursed him more on my own account than on his."

"He has, at all events, interceded for your release. What would you do outside if you were set at liberty, M. Grivois?"

"Apply to your highness for employment," replied Grivois promptly.

"*Diable!* you had better stay where you are, then. I cannot stop the mouths of half my own friends, as it is."

"Monseigneur, the abbé Dubois would not say so."

"You know him?"

"Very well, monseigneur. I will engage that he can find me something to do."

"You can try, if you like. Let this bird out of the cage, M. de Bernaville, and convey my apologies to M. du Maine, if he comes to you to grumble about it."

"Monseigneur," said the prisoner, "you shall have no cause to regret your clemency."

He bowed and went out with the lieutenant-du-roi, and M. de Torcy took the opportunity of leading off Gwynett to examine the prisoners' library in the room on the opposite side of the landing to the council-chamber.

The regent went expeditiously through the remainder of the prisoners. Three more victims of the Jesuit clique were released, and several others whose offences were purely political, including a quartette of pamphleteers who had satirized madame de Maintenon with more wit than prudence. After the list of prisoners had been exhausted, half the cells were empty, and M. de Bernaville,

whose emolument largely depended on the number and rank of his prisoners, was in despair.

"Monseigneur," he lamented, "your clemency is doubtless deserved by these people. But permit me to observe that by exercising it in this wholesale way, you have half ruined me."

"My dear governor, you are crying out before you are hurt. This week de Noailles and I are going to overhaul the accounts of the receivers and farmers-general of taxes. Unless the age of miracles has returned, you shall have a whale for each of your sprats within a month."

This intelligence restored the governor's equanimity, and as dinner was now announced, Gwynett and de Torcy were summoned, and the party adjourned to M. de Bernaville's house in the Cour du Gouvernement.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW M. JULES GRIVOIS FOUND EMPLOYMENT.

THE regent's promised onslaught on the public financiers resulted in a considerable accession of funds to the royal treasury. M. Regnault, the receiver-general of Paris, was fined one hundred thousand livres for discrepancies in his accounts, and the promptness with which this was paid led to its forming a standard by which a great many other culprits were mulcted. Most of the latter were primarily under suspicion by reason of their ostentatious personal and domestic expenditure, but these gentry were by no means the only ones from whom restitution of ill-gotten gains was effected.

One morning the regent dragged M. de Noailles into his laboratory to be an unwilling inspector of certain new apparatus which Gwynett had just arranged on the model of those at Heidelberg. Some allusions were made to a method of extracting from its matrix the gold of some specimens of Peruvian ore which had been sent to the duc d'Orléans from Spain a little while previously, and the treasurer remarked with rather a depressed air,

"It seems to me, M. de Starhemberg, that what is wanted is a method of extracting gold from a financier's concealed hoard, and not from a lump of quartz."

"If the hoards are concealed, M. le duc," asked Gwynett, "how do you know anything about them?"

"Because these *fermiers* must have had the money, and yet they make no show, but live quite plainly."

"There is nothing surprising in that, M. le duc. They are no doubt accumulating for their families, or to retire when they have secured a certain amount."

"But where is the money?" asked the treasurer peevishly.

"As to that, M. le duc, it would not be difficult to find an explanation."

"Find it, chevalier," said the regent, "and make M. de Noailles happy."

"Monseigneur," replied Gwynett, "you will pardon my saying that until of late France has not been an ideally secure place for investments."

"That is true. You think the money has been sent abroad?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"And to what country?"

"Monseigneur, I passed through Italy on my way to Spain four or five years ago, and had several friends in Venice. One heard a good deal there about French money."

"And what did you hear, M. le chevalier?" asked de Noailles eagerly.

"M. le duc, at that time Holland was closed to French subjects, and of course London also. Thus Venice was the only great banking centre open to them. If I were in monseigneur's place, I should simply make a formal demand, through the French ambassador to the Venetian republic, for a list of French depositors in the banks there, and the amounts deposited."

"An admirable idea!" cried de Noailles. "It shall be acted upon at once—eh, monseigneur?"

"By all means," assented the regent.

In due course the information applied for was furnished in full from Venice, and revealed such a mine of purloined wealth in the hands of unassuming receivers and farmers-of-taxes that a golden stream of fines poured into the royal treasury for weeks after the initiation of proceedings. This incident did not by any means diminish the respect already entertained by the regent for his chief chemist's ability and judgment, and he one day remarked to M. de Torcy that Gwynett ought to receive an extra salary as expert of all work.

"*A propos*, monseigneur," replied de Torcy, "will you permit me to ask what terms you have arranged with M. de Starhemberg?"

"I have not exactly arranged anything," said the regent. "Dr. Scholtzius knew that poor Humbert received twelve thousand livres a year, and of course that holds good for his successor."

"Then you have not yet gone into the matter with the chevalier?"

"Not yet. Why?"

"It would not be much trouble to do so," replied the marquis with a shrug of the shoulders, "and it is better to have all these things on a definite footing."

The regent admitted this, and took an early opportunity of mentioning the subject to Gwynett, asking if the salary received by his predecessor was satisfactory to him.

"This is the first I have heard of the question of salary, monseigneur," replied Gwynett, with some surprise.

"How is that, chevalier?"

"I cannot say. If Dr. Scholtzius had any instructions to mention it, he certainly omitted to do so."

The regent seemed rather put out by this intelligence.

"That is a little unfortunate," he said. "I find I have been utilizing your valuable services almost under false pretences. The salary received by M. Humbert was twelve thousand livres, and I took it for granted you came here on that understanding. But I beg you will say quite candidly if it does not meet your views, and we will make a re-arrangement."

"Monseigneur, it is not that way at all. It would be quite out of the question for me to accept anything—except your very lavish hospitality. I have some small means of my own, and it has been a rule with me to make them suffice for all my requirements. I came here to carry on my studies under very favorable conditions—not to take advantage of your liberality. The obligation is on my side, since my expenses are really at a standstill while matters remain as they are. I shall very much regret if your highness sees any occasion to alter them."

The regent recognized that this was a polite way of saying that Gwynett would not stop unless he did so on his own terms, and he ceded the point with a certain amount of admiring amusement.

"Really, chevalier," he said, laughing, "this is a sort of thing that takes one's breath away. We have been accustomed at court to find all the daughters—and sons—of all the horse-leeches hanging on to our purses. And the richer the animal the harder it sucks, as a rule. But you must please yourself; and if any unforeseen circumstances lead

you to change your mind we have only to assume that your salary has been accumulating since your arrival."

"I thank you very much, monseigneur."

After this conversation the regent spent more and more of his leisure in the laboratory, and frequently conferred with Gwynett upon matters of administration, inquiring especially into English methods of local government, manorial customs, and systems of agriculture.

At first Gwynett attached no importance to this circumstance. But before long the abbé Dubois, who had until now kept up the habit of treating his former pupil's scientific hobbies as beneath his notice, began to pay pretty frequent visits to the laboratory while the two experimentalists were engaged there. In spite of, or perhaps by virtue of, the elaborate ministerial machinery which had been set up under the new *régime*, the abbé had, almost from the day of the regent's accession to power, wormed himself into the position of being virtually prime minister "without portfolio." It was evident from chance remarks of the regent that he had taken frequent occasion to quote opinions or statements of Gwynett's to the abbé, and it was equally evident that the abbé's visits were more or less due to this fact. He displayed such politeness and deference to Gwynett on these visits, coupled with such indications of interest in the work of the laboratory, that the regent one day remarked, as he was about to go out,

"M. le chevalier, I congratulate you. You have almost made a convert of the abbé. Formerly he treated my laboratory as a sort of cross between a day-nursery and an idiot asylum. Now he is very nearly ready to concede that an intelligent person may find some interest in it. It was only yesterday he was expressing his regret that we did not utilize your abilities in some more important capacity."

"M. l'abbé does me too much honor," said Gwynett, going on with his operations.

"It is not a weakness of Dubois' to do too much honor to anything or anybody, I can assure you," remarked the regent, as he went off.

This little dialogue moved Gwynett to serious cogitation. He extinguished his spirit-lamp, and sat down to think over the situation.

"It was excessively stupid of me," he reflected, "and I

ought to have known better. This fellow is eaten up with ambition, has only monseigneur to look to for help to realize his ambition, and therefore has to be indispensable to him. Naturally, he assumes other people to be like himself, and smells an interloper. Equally naturally he will try and arrange that there shall be no interloper to smell. It is a pity. I am quite comfortable here, and the regent is really a man one can spend time with. He never bores one, and some of his ideas are astonishingly good. I hope there will be no unpleasantness, on his account as well as on my own."

Gwynett's habits in Paris had by this time become pretty much a matter of routine. He generally rode ten or a dozen miles after breakfast and before beginning operations in the laboratory. After leaving off work, he fenced for an hour most afternoons at maître Paccini's to keep his hand in. Certain evenings he devoted to reading at the great Bibliothèque Royale. The Palais-Royal suppers he had regularly eschewed after accepting a couple of invitations, as he found the society of the duke's boon companions and the actresses of the Théâtre Français a trifle wearisome. But he usually spent a couple of evenings a week at the brilliant salons of madame de Caylus and madame de Valincour, the latter of whom invariably extended a welcome whose *empressement* ought to have been more obvious to him than it actually was.

All these occupations involved his return to his quarters after the evening had closed in. As the lighting of the streets of Paris was at that period extremely imperfect, he had followed the usual practice of going armed with a pistol in addition to his sword, and of keeping a sharp look-out for footpads and cut-purses at the corners of the darker streets. Hitherto, however, he had encountered nothing more inconvenient or suspicious than an occasional shadowing by nocturnal ramblers, who probably decided, on closer inspection, that Gwynett was the sort of person best left alone, and he had consequently become somewhat careless on the point.

But after the abbé's visits, as just detailed, he decided that a little extra vigilance would not be out of place, and accordingly took his walks abroad with exceeding circumspection,

For several days nothing occurred to justify his suspicions, and he began to think that perhaps they had been exaggerated. One evening was very wet and stormy, the wind causing casements to creak and chimney-pots to tremble, while now and then pieces of tiling became dislodged and slid down the roofs into the eave-gutters. It was a Tuesday, and Gwynett had spent a couple of hours at the salon of madame de Valincour, who always received on that evening. He was returning home along the little Rue St. Louis, meditating on something in the manner of the comtesse towards him, which had for the first time forced itself upon his attention, when he noticed a couple of men in front who had kept pace with him for some little distance. Opposite the third house from the corner of the Rue St. Honoré the pair stopped, and after a moment's altercation, came to blows. One of the two fell on the sidewalk, and the other, leaving his companion on the ground, went into the house and shut the door after him.

Gwynett quickened his steps, but before he reached the spot the fallen man had risen and limped round the corner, leaving on the ground a large cloak. Gwynett was stooping to pick it up, when a violent gust of wind swung it into the air over his head with such force as to drag him backward a step or two. At the same moment he was struck on the left shoulder by some falling object, which reached the pavement with a loud crash.

The blow, although deadened by the folds of the cloak, was sufficiently severe to make him reel sideways, lose his balance, and fall. But he was not much hurt, and got up instantly, disentangling himself from the fold of the cloak as he did so. On the ground beside him lay the fragments of a large chimney-pot, evidently the object by which he had been struck.

At this moment the door of the house opposite No. 3 opened and a man came out, who crossed over to where Gwynett was standing.

"I heard a smash," said the newcomer, "and this explains it. I hope you are not hurt, monsieur?"

"I thank you—nothing to speak of," replied Gwynett. "I believe this cloak took off most of the blow."

"That was lucky," said the other. "I fancy the pots on that stack are a little shaky, for I saw a man taking one

down just before dark, evidently expecting it to be blown over if it was left. And now here is another."

Gwynett had turned towards the light of the street lantern as the speaker concluded, and the latter went on, with a little surprise in his tone.

"Why, it is M. de Starhemberg, surely?"

"That is my name," replied Gwynett, looking at his companion a little more closely, but not recognizing him.

"If monsieur will do me the honor to recollect, I was his *propriétaire* three or four years ago in the Rue des Poissonniers, when monsieur earned my undying gratitude by saving my little Charlot that night he was at death's door."

Gwynett now recognized in the speaker the public executioner of the city of Paris, Charles Sanson,* from whose mother-in-law, madame Dubut, he had rented rooms on a former visit to Paris.

"Ah! it is M. Sanson, then?" he replied. "Excuse my not recollecting you at the moment. And how is the little one?"

"The child is very well, monsieur, and grown up beautiful as an angel, in spite of losing his mother shortly after monsieur's departure from Paris. Since then I have lived here," pointing to the house opposite, "quite alone, and *en garçon*."

"I saw your niece the other day at St. Cloud," said Gwynett.

"Ah! yes," replied Sanson with some pride in his tone. "After my wife's death Thekla returned to her mother at Nonancourt—a good family of Heidelberg, monsieur, and several of them in the service of M. l'électeur Palatin, and of madame, duchesse d'Orléans."†

"Do you know these people opposite you?" asked Gwynett, who had the cloak over his arm.

"Very slightly, monsieur. Can I do anything for you there?"

"If you have an opportunity you might say that this cloak belongs to the person whom the gentleman of the

* It has elsewhere been mentioned that this Charles Sanson represented the second of the seven generations of the same name (1688–1847) who filled the same office. It was Sanson V. who executed Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette.

† The regent's mother was known as 'madame, duchesse d'Orléans'; his wife as 'madame la duchesse d'Orléans.'

house was good enough to knock down just here. Or keep the cloak yourself, if you can make any use of it."

"I will return it, monsieur, with your message. Will monsieur pardon my asking him a great favor?"

"What is it?"

"If monsieur would be so good as to come into my house for a moment to look at my little Charlot? He is asleep, and I was sure monsieur will say he never saw a more beautiful child."

Gwynett was not particularly anxious to extend his acquaintance with the "exécuteur des hautes œuvres du roi"; but the man's heart was so evidently in his request that he acceded to it without hesitation. Sanson accordingly led the way into the house, up a flight of stairs, and into a comfortably furnished room containing a large and a small bed. A small shaded lamp stood on a table, and by its light Gwynett was able to examine the features of the little boy, now about five years old, who was fast asleep in the cot. His golden curls strayed over the pillow, and his dark eyelashes rested like a shadow on the rosy velvet of his perfect oval cheeks. The father pointed to him with an expression of admiration and tenderness worthy of a *Rafaelesque* Madonna.

"Did you ever see the like, monsieur?" he asked, holding up the lamp a little behind the head of the sleeping child. Gwynett mentally agreed that it was literally, as the father had said, the face of an angel; and he whispered to Sanson,

"You are quite right, monsieur. It is a beautiful sight to see."

Sanson put down the lamp, and whispered in return,

"He has never had a day's illness since you made that wonderful cure, monsieur. I thank you very much for coming in to see him, and hope you will excuse my trespassing on your good nature."

"On the contrary, monsieur. It is a great pleasure to find him so healthy and well-grown."

"Perhaps, monsieur, the reason is partly that he has been living in the country for the last two years or more, at a little farm of mine. I thought that better for him than Paris. But his nurse, my tenant at the farm, died, and I brought Charlot back here a month ago."

Half-way down the stairs the two men stopped on a landing which commanded a view of the tiled roof of the house No. 3, opposite, with its chimney-stack and a dormer-window rising behind a parapet which extended along the eaves. The wind was still high, but the sky was clear, and a bright moon made everything visible. One chimney-pot was missing from the stack, and Sanson drew his companion's attention to the gap. Gwynett looked at the stack and then at Sanson.

"I see only one missing," he said.

"Yes. It is the one that fell on you, monsieur."

"Then where is the one you saw taken down this evening?"

Sanson seemed a little puzzled, and stared at the roof again.

"That is curious, monsieur. The man laid it on the flat of the roof, close to that dormer-window."

"If he left it there, it could not possibly fall into the street, unless it jumped over the parapet first."

"One would think so. Certainly, the wind comes in stiff gusts, but not stiff enough to lift a thing like that."

Gwynett noticed that the parapet did not extend the whole length of the eaves, and that the roof, over the place where the pot had fallen, sloped from the stack to the gutter without a break. He pointed this out to Sanson, who had no explanation to suggest of the difficulty, and then went down to the street door.

Just as this was opened by Sanson, a man and a woman, who were coming along the farther side of the street, stopped nearly opposite to exchange farewells. The man wore the garb of a parish priest, and as he stood in the moonlight, Gwynett was struck by something familiar in his face.

"Do you know that person, monsieur?" asked Sanson, noticing Gwynett's gaze in the direction of the priest, who now moved off towards the Rue St. Honoré.

"I thought so, for a moment," replied Gwynett. "Who is he?"

"Père Germont, monsieur—curé of a little place near Doullens, called Ste. Marie Geneste."

"That is he," said Gwynett to himself. "I should certainly like to find out some day what share the reverend

gentlemen had in that little job at the presbytery, and who helped him to try and burn me alive."

He turned to Sanson, and asked,

"Do you happen at all to know what sort of reputation père Germont bears?"

"As to that, M. le chevalier, one hears various things. Many people praise his piety, and a few fools, who believe in sorcery, call him a sorcerer. I take it that means he spends some of his time in chemistry, like monseigneur le régent."

"Is he often seen in Paris?"

"Occasionally, monsieur. It is usually to bring herbs, distillations of perfumes, and medicines to the shop of his niece there, whom he has just left—madame Latour."

"Ah! The herbalist of the Rue Beauregard?"

"The same, monsieur."

The woman remained standing where the priest had left her, and Gwynett recollected having once overheard a conversation between his companion and madame Latour, indicative of tender relations between them.

"Evidently I am delaying a *tête-à-tête*," he thought. "Good evening, M. Sanson," he added aloud, and turning to go.

"I thank you very much for your kindness, M. le chevalier," replied Sanson earnestly.

Gwynett went off, and the woman came slowly across the street to Sanson. The latter pulled the door to behind him, and stood on the threshold with rather an indifferent air.

"Who is your distinguished visitor, may one ask, M. Sanson?" inquired Latour, in a sour tone.

"Discretion seals my lips, my dear Marie," replied Sanson blandly.

"Someone who would rather borrow money from you than from the Jews, probably," suggested Latour, with a sneer.

"Probably—as you say, my dear Marie."

The woman was silent for a minute, and then observed with a good deal of suppressed resentment,

"No doubt it has been absence from Paris that has kept you away from the Rue Beauregard for nearly a month, M. Sanson?"

"That is it, of course," replied Sanson promptly.

"A visit to the boy at your farm, perhaps?"

"Certainly."

"And when do you intend to bring him home again?"

"I have not decided. He is doing so well in the country that it would be a pity to make a change."

The woman looked hard at Sanson, and remarked aggressively,

"I should like to go and see him there."

"I see no occasion for your troubling yourself in the matter, my dear Marie."

"That is what you always say."

"True—perhaps because it is what I always think."

"If I am not to see your son, is that any reason why I should not see you?"

Sanson hesitated a moment. Then he replied in a bored tone,

"None at all. In fact, I was quite intending to call upon you—one of these days."

"Which one?"

"Hm! Let us say to-morrow—or the day after."

"Let us say to-morrow, and not the day after."

Sanson put his hand on the door-latch.

"Very good," he said resignedly. "That is arranged. And now, my dear Marie, as I see some neighbors coming up, permit me to suggest that we should tear ourselves apart. Adieu!"

The woman looked at him for a moment, frowning, and then went away slowly. Sanson heaved a sigh of relief, and opened his door to go inside.

"To-morrow," he soliloquized, "I must catch the measles or something—that is quite clear. The constancy of our dear Marie is becoming insupportable."

* * * * *

Meanwhile Gwynett had returned to the Palais-Royal, and was thinking over his narrow escape in the Rue St. Louis.

"That pot seems to require explanation," he ruminated. "It would be curious if it jumped up two feet and then fell more than a yard sideways. But there would be nothing curious in its being thrown."

He went back in imagination to the appearance of the



house-front, as he had seen it from Sanson's stair-landing, and recollected that there was a solitary casement window on the third floor, almost exactly over the place where the cloak had been left lying.

"Not thrown," he decided. "Dropped. And now I think of it, that scuffle strikes me as being a little queer. Why didn't the second man follow the first into the house, or try? And if the cloak was left on the ground by accident, why did neither of the fellows come back for it? There was scarcely sufficient excitement for it to get forgotten."

He sipped his coffee, and finally struck upon an idea.

"If one wanted to do somebody a mischief quite accidentally," he soliloquized, "it would not be a bad notion to cause him to stop exactly under a window, and then drop something on him that had an air of probability about it. Unless he stopped, it would be very easy to miscalculate, and miss him. We have had a good many rough nights of late, and on any one of these a chimney-pot might have fallen very reasonably. It was quite an accident that Sanson happened to see this one removed beforehand. But why on me? Was I the first comer with a respectable appearance, and consequently liable to be mistaken for someone else? *Per contra*, I have nearly always come from madame de Valincour's Tuesdays just about that time, and therefore I might be expected. Certainly those two men took no trouble to find out who I was, and probably they knew already. It might be well to learn who lives at No. 3."

The next day Gwynett took steps to get this information, but the result did not tend to elucidate matters. The occupier of the house was a respectable clothier, who received a good many callers on business, and it would probably give offence to push inquiries any further. So Gwynett confined himself to walking in the middle of the street after dark, and preserving a strict neutrality with regard to any squabbles which came under his notice.

But one night about a week later, coming home from the Bibliothèque Royale, his precautions were suddenly rendered useless by an attack made upon him by two men in the Rue St. Antoine.

The pair ran from under an archway so quickly that he

had only just time to draw his pistol and fire it at the foremost. Unfortunately the weapon missed fire, and he therefore flung it with all his force at his assailant's face. The fellow stopped short, and put his hands to his mouth and forehead with a volley of curses.

The other, and taller of the two, advanced, sword in hand, and began a furious attack upon Gwynett. But the latter had no difficulty in making his opponent lose ground, and the man called loudly to his companion to give him help. The shorter man, who had been wiping the blood from his face, picked up a small hatchet, which he had dropped when first struck, and advanced to take Gwynett in the rear.

This danger was avoided by a dart sideways, which enabled Gwynett to sweep his sword at arm's length across the shorter man's face before he could raise either arm to protect it. The man dropped his hatchet the second time, just as Gwynett made a lunge through his shoulder and then withdrew the weapon in time to be on guard for his other assailant.

The renewed combat had not lasted a minute when the swordsman fell, mortally wounded by a thrust through the chest. The short fellow had in the meantime staggered off, groaning, and made his escape round the nearest corner.

Gwynett kicked the dying man's sword out of reach, and turned the body over to see if the face were known to him.

The moon was struggling fitfully through driving clouds, and by its light he recognized the fellow-prisoner of old Petroni in the Bastille.

"That explains things," he said to himself. "I should like to know if this man or his fellow cut-throat lived at No. 3 in the Rue St. Louis. Perhaps one could find out that."

He looked at his watch. It was only about half-past eight o'clock.

"There is time to dispose of the business," he thought. "And the sooner the better. If this sort of thing is to go on, I might as well be back in Madrid."

He looked again at his late assailant. He was quite dead. Gwynett laid the sword beside him, covered the face with

the hat, and went off to the Rue St. Louis. He knocked at the door of No. 3, and the summons was answered by a serving-maid.

"Has M. Grivois come in yet?" asked Gwynett.

"No, monsieur," replied the girl. "But we expect him very soon. Will monsieur leave a message?"

"It is not necessary," said Gwynett.

He turned off to the Rue St. Honoré, saying to himself,

"He lodged there, no doubt. Now for the puller of the wires."

Arrived at the Palais-Royal, he went into the wing of the building where the abbé Dubois had his apartments, and asked to see him. The officials there did not know Gwynett, who had never presented himself in that part of the palace before, and they informed him that the abbé had given orders to admit no one that evening.

"My business is a little urgent," said Gwynett.

"M. l'abbé's instructions were precise, monsieur."

"He will receive me, nevertheless," averred Gwynett, with a good deal of positiveness, as a gentleman-in-waiting came up. "Be good enough, monsieur, to ask him."

"What name shall I give, monsieur?" asked the official, rather impressed by Gwynett's peremptory tone.

"M. Jules Grivois," replied Gwynett.

CHAPTER XII.

A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING.

THE usher went off, and presently returned, saying, "M. l'abbé will see M. Grivois. Please to follow me, monsieur."

Gwynett did so, and as they reached the top of the stairs, Dubois came out of a room on the landing. He seemed extremely surprised at seeing Gwynett, but at once put on a smile of gratification.

"Good evening, M. le chevalier," he said. "This is an unexpected pleasure. Come this way."

He pointed to the room he had just left, and looked daggers at the usher, evidently assuming that Gwynett had been admitted under his own name and against his general orders. The usher began to stammer something, but the abbé cut short with a curt,

"Presently."

As this was quite unintelligible to the usher he opened his mouth to ask for an explanation. But the abbé waved his hand with another frown, and followed Gwynett into his cabinet, shutting the door after him. He motioned his guest to a *fauteuil*, and seated himself in his writing-chair at the table.

"You have made me wait a good, long time for the honor of a visit from you, my dear M. de Starhemberg," he remarked, urbanely. "But better late than never. I hope you have come to say I can do you some little service."

"Not at all, M. l'abbé. The fact is, that somehow or other I felt extremely bored by my own society, and thought it would be an agreeable novelty to drop in and have a few minutes' chat with you."

The abbé saw that he was not exactly expected to believe this exordium, and waited with a bow for further enlightenment.

"Your people guard you like a fortress," resumed Gwynett, "and I hope your usher will not get into trouble

for admitting me. If you have any appointment for this hour, I beg you will not hesitate to send me away. Was it M. Grivois I met just now? I think I recognized him from seeing him in the Bastille the other morning."

"He can wait," replied the abbé, not feeling quite sure of his ground.

"So I was right," said Gwynett to himself. He went on aloud,

"Thank you. It is very good of you to allow me a slice of your time. You must be enormously busy under the new state of affairs. I admire without understanding it."

"What is it you do not understand, M. le chevalier?"

"Why you should take all this trouble—the trouble of concerning yourself with the government of the country. For it is no secret, M. l'abbé, that you have a very fat finger in the pie."

"Assuming you are right, M. le chevalier, what do you find remarkable about it?"

"I always find it remarkable that anyone should make any sacrifice of time or trouble for the sake of fame or power. And, unless I am mistaken, you are rather that sort of person, M. l'abbé. That surprises me."

"You will not find many people to share your surprise, M. le chevalier."

"Possibly. It is very curious, all the same. For instance, let us take it for granted you would like to be famous. What is fame? First of all you earn the admiration of some man of whose judgment you have no opinion whatever; you multiply this man by a million, call it being famous, and are proud of it. Nevertheless, you still continue to despise each one of the million, taken by himself."

A half-smile flitted across the face of the abbé.

"*Certes*, that is one view of the matter," he said. "But if you can say that of fame, you can hardly say it of power."

"What is there then so admirable in power? Most people spend all their days in doing ignoble things in an ignoble way. Power consists in being able to compel people to do ignoble things my way instead of theirs. That might annoy them; but it would scarcely amuse me."

"But, chevalier, power usually means wealth also. I suppose all of us would like to be a little richer than we are?"

"It would entirely depend upon the conditions. For myself, I have not yet met with the conditions that would make it palatable."

The abbé became rather alert at this observation.

"Are you then going to leave us, M. le chevalier? Or are twelve thousand livres a year too small a morsel to leave any taste in your mouth?"

"If you are referring to my post in monseigneur's laboratory, M. l'abbé, you are perhaps not aware that I have declined to receive any remuneration whatever for my services there, such as they are."

The abbé looked genuinely surprised.

"I was not aware of that, M. le chevalier. Is it permitted to ask why?"

"Simply, M. l'abbé, because if I have a hobby, it is to meet people on an equal footing. I have a sufficient income of my own, and I never incur money obligations to anybody. As matters stand, I find the facilities afforded me, together with the society of monseigneur, very agreeable, and occasionally instructive, and I desire to enjoy both on my own terms so long as I care to stay in Paris."

"Decidedly you are a philosopher, M. de Starhemberg, and I do not say you are wrong."

"Tastes always differ, M. l'abbé. If I, for my part, find fame a little absurd, power very undesirable, and other people's money not quite suitable for my acceptance, that is no reason why anyone else should agree with me. I only wish to make clear to you why, for the moment, I am in Paris rather than in Heidelberg, or Munich, or elsewhere."

The abbé stroked his chin reflectively, and remarked, with a visible clearing of the face,

"Permit me to say, M. le chevalier, that your views interest me much. It is perhaps excusable that I could not very well guess at them before."

"I did not expect it," said Gwynett. "May I ask, M. l'abbé, if you are fond of living in the country?"

"I never tried it," replied the abbé, rather at a loss to understand this sudden change of subject.

"Ah! It is very pleasant, for some things. I was brought up in the country, in Kent. Of course, there are drawbacks. In Kent we used to have a good many wasps. Were you ever stung by a wasp, M. l'abbé?"

"I cannot recollect such a thing."

"You would find it very disagreeable. During summer time in Kent these insects were often quite a nuisance. One could put up with one wasp, or perhaps two; but if more of them came about, and they began to be objectionable, do you know what we generally did?"

"I have not the slightest idea," replied the abbé, endeavoring to conceal his impatience at this not very interesting digression.

"We used to hunt for the nest, M. l'abbé. When we found it—which was usually easy—a kettle of boiling water, or a handful of gunpowder, or a little sulphur did the business. After that, we were not molested. It was less trouble in the end, you observe, than dealing with individual insects."

"I have no doubt, M. le chevalier."

Gwynett rose, as if to terminate his visit.

"Well, M. l'abbé, I have bored you long enough, I am sure. It is very good of you to waste so much of your time on me—the more so as I take it you have still a visitor to see. M. Grivois, is it not?"

"Some such name, I believe," replied the abbé negligently, as he rose, in his turn.

"Do not wait for him too long, M. l'abbé."

"Why not?"

"I do not think he will be able to come."

"What makes you suppose so, M. le chevalier?"

"Well, for one thing, he is dead."

"Dead! Since when?"

"About half-past eight this evening."

"Impossible! He was here just now."

"That would have been clever of him."

"Then you know he is dead?"

"I ought to know, certainly."

"Why?"

"Because I killed him. You will find his body in the gutter somewhere along the Rue St. Antoine—if you care to look."

The abbé gazed speechlessly at his visitor for several seconds. Then he ejaculated, as Gwynett turned towards the door,

“Why on earth, M. le chevalier, did you not tell me that before?”

“My dear M. l’abbé, I have been telling you nothing else for the last half-hour. Good evening.”

Gwynett opened the door, and went out. The abbé fell back into his chair dumfounded.

He sat for some time absorbed in thought, with his head resting on his hand. Then he straightened himself, rang his little bell, and muttered, with a certain air of relief,

“Perhaps it is as well—after all, it has saved me some little expense. Certainly this is a devil of a fellow.”

BOOK II

KING, BY RIGHT DIVINE

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CHAPTER XIII.

HOW LORD STAIR WAS UNEASY.

FOR several weeks after lord Stair's visit to the regent the affairs of the Pretender continued to give the worthy ambassador continual work and worry. The earl of Mar—known to his contemporaries as “Bobbing John,” from his having been twice a Tory, twice a Whig, and finally a Jacobite rebel—had carried out the orders sent from Bar-le-duc by the chevalier de St. George, and had raised the Stuart standard on September 6th, at Kirk-michael. This inaugurated the Jacobite rebellion in 1715.

A little later the duke of Ormonde sailed from France to make a descent on the English coast, but met with such tempestuous weather that he was unable to land. In the meantime, he learned that his factotum, colonel McLeane, had taken the opportunity of betraying the plans of the expedition to the English government. This made it useless to think of raising the west country for the Stuarts, as had been intended, so that Ormonde had to return to Paris rather discomfited.

The chevalier's ships and the bulk of the arms and stores at Havre which had been discovered and denounced by admiral Byng, were put under an embargo by the regent, on lord Stair's representations. A portion, however, had escaped detection, and lay in readiness for the arrival of the Pretender from Lorraine. This step had been continuously urged upon him, by the whole Jacobite party in Great Britain, as absolutely necessary for the

success of the rising. But hitherto the Pretender had displayed a good deal of unwillingness to share the risks which were being run on his behalf by other people.

Meanwhile Bolingbroke, who was quite the most esteemed and influential English Jacobite in France, was unceasing in his endeavors to secure either assistance or a friendly neutrality from the regent. But this was prevented by the watchfulness of Dubois, and the utmost that he could gain was an understanding that the French authorities would be blind and deaf as long as they decently could. Lord Stair, who was in daily expectation of the Pretender's flight from Lorraine, multiplied his spies and made M. d'Argenson's life a burden to him; while lord Cadogan, from his post at Brussels, employed agents to keep watch at Nancy.

Nothing definite, however, occurred until the beginning of November. Early on the morning of the 9th, lord Stair came in haste to the Palais Royal, and asked for an immediate interview with the regent. After a short delay he was taken to M. d'Orléans, who was sitting with the abbé Dubois.

"Monseigneur," began the ambassador, "the time has come for me to claim the fulfilment of your promise."

"Well, milord," replied the regent, "I am always as good as my word. What has happened?"

"The chevalier de St. George has left the château de Commercy, where he has been for three weeks the guest of M. de Vaudémont, and has started for the coast. He will sleep to-night at Château Thierry, and I have formally to request that he may be arrested and conducted back to Lorraine."

"Who has told you of all this, milord?" asked the regent, with a good deal of scepticism in his tone.

"One of my agents, who witnessed the departure, and has used up twelve horses to bring the news."

"Your agent, then, did not act upon mere rumor?" interposed Dubois, without ceremony.

"He followed the travelling-carriage—a private one—to the frontier before leaving it. There were half a dozen of the chevalier's suite, including father Innis and the two Jacobite agents, captain Floyd and M. Iberville."

The regent looked at Dubois, and gathered from the

abbé's expression that there was no loophole of escape from his obligations. So he replied,

"That seems pretty clear, milord. Orders shall be given to stop the chevalier at Château Thierry, as you request."

"I hope those orders may be given at once, monseigneur," went on the persistent diplomatist.

The regent drummed with his fingers on the table a little impatiently. Then he turned to Dubois, and said,

"Let us have Contades here."

The abbé rose and went out, returning presently with an officer in the uniform of a major in the king's Guards.

"Major Contades," said the regent, who had been writing a few lines on a sheet of paper, "you will set out at once for Château Thierry, and await the arrival of M. le chevalier de St. George, whom you will conduct back to Bar. Take with you your brother from your regiment and a couple of sergeants. Here is your warrant."

He handed the paper to the officer, and added,

"Keep your commission a secret, and execute it as circumspectly as possible. The less known about M. le chevalier's journey and return, the better."

"What if the chevalier and his companions are numerous enough to resist, and do so?" inquired the major cautiously.

"In that case you will keep them under close observation and send back one of your men to report. But you are authorized to demand assistance to any extent you may require, and you must secure enough to leave the chevalier no possible excuse for any appeal to force."

At this moment the ambassador's attention was taken off for a moment, and the regent utilized the opportunity to shake his head at the major. The latter, who was a good deal behind the scenes of the regent's personal sympathies, smiled imperceptibly, bowed, and went out.

"Can you suggest anything more, milord?" asked the regent urbanely.

"Nothing, monseigneur, at present—unless M. d'Argenson can find an excuse for interfering with the *canaille* who come in groups to shout 'Vive Job!' opposite my house at all hours of the day."

"'Vive Job!'" echoed the regent, to whom this political *jeu d'esprit* was not as yet known. "I don't see exactly

why they should want to shout 'Vive Job!' or why you should want to stop them. It seems to me that the patriarch was a decidedly over-rated person. If he had been regent of France I fancy we should have heard very little about him."

"Monseigneur, it is an impudent acrostic, composed of the initials of James, Ormonde, and Bolingbroke. The rebels have been bawling it in London for a month or more, and it has just been brought over to Paris to annoy me."

Dubois grinned, and the regent replied,

"As to that, milord, your only remedy is to invent a better acrostic for your own side. That is the way to succeed with the Parisians. But *au revoir*; we shall meet, I hope, at madame de Valincour's reception to-night. She complains that you have quite deserted her lately."

The earl bowed with a good deal of gratification.

"I must explain to madame la comtesse," he replied, "that I have had to desert everything agreeable since the outbreak of the rebellion. But I hope that will soon be over—all the sooner for your highness's prompt action to-day."

The same evening a great gathering assembled at madame de Valincour's new house in the Rue St. Honoré, which had just been given her by the regent, and to which she had a week or two previously removed. This reception was thus a sort of house-warming, and all who wished to be in the good graces of the regent took care to come and pay their respects to the beautiful favorite.

About nine o'clock, when the throng was at its densest and the regent had just arrived in company with lord Stair, a message was brought to the latter that someone wished to speak to him. Knowing from the name given that it was of importance, he apologized to his hostess and went down to a little reception-room in the entrance hall. Here he found a confidential agent of his, named Douglas, a colonel in one of the Irish regiments serving under the French flag. The earl shut the door, and asked,

"Well, colonel?"

"My lord, a most extraordinary thing has happened, and I do not know how to act."

"What is the matter?"

"Agreeably to your lordship's orders I kept on the track of the Pretender, intending to make some disturbance at Château Thierry, as instructed. But before we got there the chevalier left the party, took horse alone, and rode away south by way of Montmirail. I followed him immediately, and found that he rejoined the main road at La Ferté. Thence he rode straight to Paris, and we passed the barrier ten minutes ago. Of course I kept him in view through the city."

"And where is he now?"

"Here, my lord."

"What!"

"He is in this house."

"Nonsense!"

"I assure you, my lord, he entered the side door on the left, and passed in as if he were expected. Luckily, two of our men are in your suite here, so I posted them to watch the side and back of the house. It is very unlikely he would leave again by the front, but at the same time it might be well for me to remain in the entrance hall."

"It is excessively awkward," remarked the earl. "The comtesse has certainly pretended to be a Jacobite. But as matters stand between her and the regent, one would expect that sort of thing to be put on the shelf."

"Do you suppose, my lord, that the regent is privy to it?"

"Impossible to say. Whichever way it is, there will be a scandal. It is like putting one's finger between the hammer and the anvil. But let us go back into the hall."

As they did so, the regent came down the stairs with Dubois, apparently about to take his departure. He noticed the earl near the door, and remarked,

"Ah! milord, and are you going, too?"

"No, monseigneur—at least, not just yet. But I should like a word with your highness before you leave."

"Certainly," replied the regent, pointing to the reception-room. "You need not wait for me, abbé."

"On the contrary, monseigneur," said the earl, who had been accustomed to find the abbé a good deal more sympathetic than the regent himself, "I hope M. l'abbé will give me the benefit of his advice."

He signed to Douglas to remain on guard over the front

door, and went into the little room with the regent and Dubois.

"Monseigneur," he began, "it is very embarrassing for me, I assure you; but the fact is that M. le chevalier de St. George has just entered this house."

"Impossible, milord!" exclaimed the regent.

"There is not the slightest doubt of it," replied Stair. "Under the circumstances I can only ask your highness to do what you think right and proper. I should be in despair if anything occurred to annoy madame la comtesse."

"Who saw the chevalier?" asked the regent incredulously.

"Colonel Douglas, who was with me just now. He has followed him from Lorraine without losing sight of him."

The regent was a little staggered, and turned inquiringly to Dubois. The abbé took things very coolly.

"Monseigneur," he remarked, "it is quite simple. Ask the comtesse."

"Very good," returned the regent. "Come, milord."

The three men went back to the hall, and thence to the salon, which was beginning to thin. In response to a glance from the regent, the comtesse left her guests and came forward.

"Comtesse," said the regent, "milord Stair complains that you are selfishly keeping some of your guests to yourself instead of allowing us to share the pleasure of their society with you."

"I was not aware of it, monseigneur. Whom do I keep, and where do I keep them?"

"Milord thinks perhaps in your private boudoir—or perhaps in your pocket. I don't exactly know. Ask him."

"Perhaps madame has a visitor unknown to her," suggested the earl, a little uncomfortably.

"That is possible, of course," replied the comtesse. "But whom?"

"Let us say the chevalier de St. George, for example," said the regent.

"The chevalier here?"

"So milord Stair says."

"That would be a great honor," replied the comtesse, smiling enigmatically.

"Madame," put in Dubois, "to save time, may we ask if the chevalier is under this roof?"

"Not to my knowledge, M. l'abbé."

"Have you any private visitor here, madame?"

Even lord Stair could not help smiling at this excessively indiscreet question. But the comtesse was not at all disturbed.

"I have not heard of anyone, M. l'abbé."

"May we inquire, madame?"

"Of course."

The comtesse signed to a servant, and told him to send her maid. Presently the girl appeared, and the comtesse asked,

"Is there anyone in my room, Ninette?"

"Yes, madame," replied the girl, without hesitation.

The regent laughed, and lord Stair looked triumphant.

"May we interview this guest of yours, madame?" asked Dubois.

"By all means, abbé. Shall I accompany you, or remain here?"

"Come with us, madame. Then milord Stair will not suppose you have been doing any conjuring behind our backs."

"Really, M. l'abbé——" began Stair reproachfully.

"Milord," interrupted the regent, "do you know the chevalier by sight?"

"No, monseigneur; but colonel Douglas does."

"Fetch him, abbé," said the regent, "and order all the doors to be closed till we return."

Douglas made his appearance, and the party proceeded to the comtesse's boudoir. When the door was opened, a man was seen seated at a table near the farther end of the room, and engaged upon his supper. He raised his head, threw a kiss to the comtesse, and rose to bow to the regent. Stair looked at Douglas, and the latter nodded, saying,

"The chevalier, my lord."

Dubois chuckled to himself. The comtesse went forward, and kissed the man at the table.

"Monseigneur," she said, "permit me to present to you my brother, the abbé Armand Gaultier, whose name may be known to you in connection with the recent peace negotiations."

The abbé Gaultier bowed again to the regent, who came forward and shook hands with him.

Douglas looked on with a stupefied air, and quite lost to the reproachful glances of the ambassador.

"Is this your chevalier, then, milord?" inquired Dubois, with one of his grins.

"It is some unaccountable mistake, M. l'abbé," said the discomfited earl, "for which I hope you will accept my excuses."

The regent laughed good-naturedly.

"Certainly there is a slight resemblance," he said, "between M. Gaultier and the chevalier, but that is all. I hope it will never involve M. Gaultier in any greater inconvenience than being disturbed at his supper, for which I am sure we all apologize."

"Monseigneur," replied Gaultier, "I am greatly indebted to any mistake which has enabled me to become known to your highness."

"Add, to milord Stair, also," said the regent, with a bow in the direction of the ambassador. "Although it appears his friends in England are anxious to cut the throats of everybody concerned in the treaty of Utrecht."

The earl smiled perfunctorily at this suggestion, bowed to Gaultier, and made a movement of retreat with colonel Douglas. The regent and the abbé Dubois followed their example, leaving the comtesse to exchange a few words with her brother.

When they were back in the salon, the regent turned to lord Stair, saying,

"I trust this episode will allay your apprehension, milord. It seems we have sent major Contades on rather a wild-geese chase."

"It must be remembered, monseigneur," replied the earl, who had had time to recollect matters, "that several of the chevalier's suite and M. Gaultier were in company together. Colonel Douglas's mistake was therefore partly excusable."

"No doubt," said the regent, in a tone that was obviously intended to close the discussion. He bowed an adieu to the earl and the colonel, and went away with the abbé Dubois.

Lord Stair turned to Douglas and said in a tone of extreme irritation,

"This is a damnable mare's nest of yours, colonel. See what a ridiculous figure you have made me cut!"

"My lord," replied Douglas brusquely, "all this is neither here nor there. Whoever this man is, he has been under my eye for the last ten days at Commercy, and accepted as the chevalier by everybody."

"Well, well! I daresay there is some likeness," said the earl grudgingly. "But it is none the less a most annoying mistake."

"It seems to me your lordship does not realize what it all involves," said Douglas.

"What does it all involve, in your opinion?" snapped the earl.

"My lord, if this man is not the chevalier, there is no other chevalier at Bar or at Commercy."

"What do you mean?" asked the earl, in a startled tone.

"What I say, my lord. This M. Gaultier is all that there has been to represent the chevalier in Lorraine for the last ten days or more."

The earl turned pale, and fell into a chair.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated. "But where is the chevalier himself?"

The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"How the devil should I know?" he growled.

"Then he has escaped!" gasped the earl.

"It looks very like it," said the colonel sulkily.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ABBÉ GAULTIER'S PROGRAMME.

M Y dear Armand," asked the comtesse, as soon as she was alone with her brother, "what on earth have you been doing to yourself? I scarcely think I should have known you, if I had not known it could be no one else."

"It is rather a long story," replied the abbé, resuming his supper, "and will keep till you are at liberty. Probably you cannot desert your guests just yet."

"I will leave you till the rooms are clear, and then come back. The people will go as soon as monseigneur sets the example. Have you what you want?"

"Everything. Except, perhaps, a boot-jack and slippers. I have been in the saddle twelve hours, and am dead tired."

"I will send them. Smoke, if you like."

The comtesse went out, and sent a servant who relieved the abbé of his riding-coat and boots, and furnished him with a dressing-gown and slippers. He was sitting in much comfort before the fire, and half-way through his first pipe, when madame de Valincour came back again. She went to a secretaire, and looked into one or two of the drawers while talking to her brother.

"They are all gone," she said. "We have the rest of the night to ourselves. You will sleep here, I suppose?"

"If I am not *de trop*," replied the abbé.

"Monseigneur goes to Vincennes to-night," explained the comtesse.

The abbé looked round the room, and then remarked inquiringly,

"He has done things rather handsomely, it appears?"

"As you see. At the same time, it was by no will of mine. I have made a point of asking—and, if possible, accepting—nothing whatever from him. I do not care to

be taken for one of the crowd he has been accustomed to, who do nothing but fleece him till he throws them aside."

"Probably he finds that a little novel."

"One would think so. But I could not very well avoid accepting this house, because it has some arrangements made for his own private convenience."

The abbé nodded, and filled his pipe again.

"How have the discarded ones taken it?" he asked.

"I have heard very little. Naturally, I take care to run as few risks as possible, especially in the way of dining out. I keep my old cook, and I think it would be difficult for anyone to tamper with him. At the same time, one cannot supplant people without being liable to some unpleasantness or other. I am really more concerned about the duke's male friends than the women."

"How?"

"I am very anxious to get him into more regular habits of life. No constitution can stand being traded upon forever, and I fancy monseigneur is nearer the end of his tether than people suppose. That would be a disaster without remedy. Already, however, he has a good deal curtailed his Palais-Royal suppers and other things, gets to bed at reasonable hours, and drinks—as he says—a little more like a beast and less like a man."

"Meaning, I suppose, for the mere purpose of quenching his thirst?" asked the abbé. "That is still, I regret to say, my own deplorable case," he added, ruefully.

"I am thankful to hear that," replied the comtesse earnestly, "for we are by no means out of the wood yet, my dear Armand. Until we are at war with Spain things will be very precarious, as I have explained to you in my letters."

The abbé looked at the fire for some seconds in silence, and then remarked meditatively,

"Certainly, my dear Yvonne, you have wonderfully succeeded in your plans. But how easily you might have failed! To stake everything on the duke's taking a fancy to you was running a tremendous risk."

"It would have been so with anyone but the duke," replied the comtesse. "That is one advantage of a man being ready to take up with any pretty woman who comes in his way."

"Unfortunately," remarked the abbé, "he is just as ready to put one down as to take one up."

The comtesse smiled with serene confidence.

"Not necessarily," she said. "There are women and women—or, I should say, women and a woman. I find everything very much as I expected. Of course, it has been of the greatest utility to work hand-in-hand with M. Dubois. But that was part of my programme from the first."

"And having won the game, do you really think it is worth the candle?" inquired the abbé seriously.

"My dear Armand, I have not won the game. I have won a seat at the card-table, but that is only the first step. The rest is all to come."

The abbé gave a little yawn, and leaned back in his chair.

"Well, sister, I wish you every success. For myself, I should find these fine affairs a little too fatiguing. One gets old every day. Give me a trifling competence, and anybody in creation may handle the sceptre for aught I care."

"You shall have your trifling competence in due course, dear Armand. But you will have to wait till it can come without the appearance of my having to ask for anything. I suppose there is no hurry?"

"No. I have an affair in hand which will suit me very well for the present."

"Is it that which has brought you here to-night?"

"Partly."

At this moment the comtesse appeared to find something for which she had been looking in the secretaire, and came forward holding a miniature framed in Venetian glass. It was a portrait of the abbé, and a very faithful presentment of his features two or three years before.

"I was a little curious," she said, "to compare this likeness with your present appearance. It is the eyebrows, is it not, that makes the difference?"

"Chiefly," replied the abbé, glancing at the miniature. "Also a silver plate which I wear in my mouth, and which accounts for a little, as you see."

The abbé put his fingers behind his teeth, and unhooked a sort of spring with two flanges, which had the effect,

while worn, of giving a pendent look to the cheeks. Its removal made a notable change in his appearance, and the former difference between his features and those of the portrait almost disappeared.

"What is it all about?" asked the comtesse.

"It is part of the affair—the mare's nest that those people discovered just now. I will explain it to you."

The abbé settled himself comfortably in his chair, and began his story.

"Do you happen to recollect, three years ago or so, I mentioned to you that on the occasion of my first seeing M. de Berwick he seemed to find some slight likeness between myself and the chevalier de St. George?"

"I think I remember that."

"At the time I had never seen the chevalier. But when I went to Bar-le-duc this last summer, I noticed the resemblance at once—so much so that I forthwith decided, in view of possible contingencies, to suppress it."

"Why?"

"Because it occurred to me that at some juncture or other it might be desirable to turn the likeness to account by personating the chevalier. Therefore, the fewer the people who knew of its being possible, the better?"

"And how did you proceed to efface yourself?"

"I had only to wear the red wig, the patch, and the blue spectacles, which I always carry about with me for emergencies; and I took care never to be seen without them, especially when in company with the chevalier."

"You said nothing about that in your letters."

"It was not worth while, then. As to my early relations with the chevalier, you know all about them. There was no difficulty in getting on exceedingly intimate terms with him, thanks to a little philandering with the excellent Oglethorpe, who does her best to keep his most sacred majesty as sober and as little imbecile as possible. But until recently it really seemed as if one were wasting time, especially when the Scotch rising was started without even the poor assistance of the chevalier's presence."

"That made rather a bad impression here."

"I should think so. However, after a couple of months' fidgiting and indecision, M. de St. George was finally persuaded that he must risk something if he wished to gain

everything, and so decided to make his way to Scotland. The difficulty, of course, was to get off without being detected by milord Stair's spies, who were everywhere, and that difficulty would probably have proved insuperable but for me. It was then the likeness came in useful."

The comtesse nodded appreciatively, and the abbé relit his pipe, which had gone out.

"I took care," he resumed, "to wait until the whole party were at a nonplus. Then I spoke, first of all, to M. le prince de Vaudémont. We were at the château de Commercy at the time. I asked for a private interview with M. le prince, and in his presence removed all my own accessories, painted my eyebrows to imitate the chevalier's, and stuffed some wool in my cheeks. Then I asked if my appearance suggested anything to him. I assure you he was quite taken by surprise—so much so that he was moved to confide to me that he had been prepared to advance a considerable sum to the chevalier if only a practicable method of evading milord Stair's espionage could be hit upon."

"Did he say how much?"

"Happily, yes. Twenty-seven thousand louis in gold.* I take credit to myself that I did not jump out of my chair when he mentioned those magnificent figures. But I need not say I devoted myself on the instant, heart and soul, to the furtherance of the chevalier's escape."

"You think that with all that money he may really do something across the Channel?"

The abbé looked at his sister with a good deal of surprise.

"The idea never crossed my mind," he replied seriously. "You surely do not suppose I should ever let the money be wasted in any such fashion if I could prevent it?"

"Ah!" said the comtesse. "You thought some of it might more suitably find its way into your own pocket?"

"I am quite sure you agree with me that no possible number of birds in the bush could for a moment compare with such a one in the hand. Naturally, therefore, it became my business to start M. de Vaudémont's twenty-

* About £25,000.

seven thousand louis on their travels—because, you see, when one is travelling, all sorts of things may happen.”

“Have they happened?”

“Not yet, as you will see.”

“Well, go on.”

“M. le prince followed up his confidence by asking me if I had any detailed plan to suggest. Of course I had one. It was quite simple, and they adopted it. A fortnight’s hunting party was arranged at the château de Commercy, in honor of the chevalier. He came over again from the château de Bar for the purpose, attended by his suite. I was amongst them, dressed in my abbé’s *soutane* and hat—a cursed garb, which I loathe—with my usual red wig, patch, and spectacles. I got the prince’s surgeon to make me this silver spring with plates, for greater security, and altered my eyebrows with tweezers—a job worth five thousand louis at the very least. You have no idea how it hurts.”

“But what was your plan?”

“I am coming to it. There is a little huntsman’s cabin in the heart of the forest. The chevalier and myself arranged to find ourselves there by accident one day, while M. le prince and father Innis kept watch at a distance. As an extra precaution, the chevalier invented a bad face-ache that morning, and came to the hunt with his face tied up. We exchanged clothes, and I put my plate inside my jaws. The chevalier assumed my wig, patch, and spectacles, and we rejoined the hunt. That evening the sham abbé set out for the coast in a carriage of M. de Vaudémont’s, with the gold in an oak box, hidden under the seat. The sham chevalier went to bed to nurse his face-ache, which he did for nearly a week. Nobody suspected anything. Then I left Commercy with some of the chevalier’s people, who were not in the plot, and returned to Bar, affecting a certain amount of secrecy. The next morning we started for Paris. Of course, milord Stair’s spies followed us, and at Château Thierr I amused myself by leaving the rest of the party and making a *dé tour* on horseback by way of Montmirail and Le Ferté. Thus I am here.”

“And what about the chevalier?”

“He was to go to Chaillot, where M. de Lauzun has lent

him a little house close to the convent. There he was to change his abbé's disguise for a priest's costume, and take a chaise to St. Malo by way of Alençon. The rest of us follow by different routes to join him at St. Malo or on the way. In the meantime, I become the abbé Gaultier again, in my usual lay attire."

"And what is the programme as to the money?"

"That must depend on circumstances. The chevalier will not let it go out of his sight, and he intended to sleep in his carriage. If no opportunity presents itself earlier, we have to go on board a vessel which has been hired from Havre-de-Grace, and I hope that will give an opening."

"A French vessel?" asked the comtesse.

"No, English—she is called the *Royal Mary*. The people on her are well known to the Stuart partisans. I have come across one or two of them myself."

The comtesse ruminated for a little, and then remarked,

"It will be absolutely necessary for you not to fail, or at all events not to be found out. People have prejudices, even in Paris. Monseigneur is a good deal more Jacobite than M. Dubois. At the worst, I suppose you will accompany the money to Scotland?"

"*Certes*—but that will be very unlucky. Once ashore in Scotland, the louis will disappear like snow in summer, and there will soon be nothing left worth stealing. Of course, it will then become a question of how much one can get by selling the chevalier to the English government."

"Hm! That will smell worse than the other, if it gets about."

"Of course, it shall not get about."

"You are not hopeful of the chevalier's success, then?"

"It is not possible, except by a miracle. You would say so yourself, if you were with that crew for ten minutes."

"The opening out of a chance for real activity may reveal something unexpected about the chevalier. Hitherto he has been very much tied by the leg."

The abbé shrugged his shoulders.

"The chevalier is one of those people who always wait till someone pulls the chestnuts out of the fire for them.

But they know so little about him in Scotland that he may pass muster for a week or two, of course."

"Even if it be so, I fail to see what great benefit could accrue from betraying him to the English government. They would not pay much, under the circumstances."

"That is another story altogether. It is of some importance for me to be in their good graces over there. Since the queen's death, as you know, all the treaty people have been under a cloud, or snuffed out altogether, and it might be as much as my neck is worth to be found in England while matters stand as they are at present. Now, I have urgent occasion to be in England and on comfortable terms."

"Why?"

"It is that affair of an heiress I told you about some time back. I have by no means given it up. But she seems to have disappeared in some curious way, and I want to take up the search for her. To do that, I must not only be free from molestation, but be able to get a little assistance in various ways from persons in authority. Hence I am doubly bound to do something as a *quid pro quo*."

"Perhaps she is married," suggested the comtesse.

"In that case, she and her husband would have presented themselves at her place in Devonshire—which, I happen to know, has not occurred."

"She may be dead."

"Then the next heir would have come and taken possession of Dorrington Hall. That has not occurred either."

"It is a good property, then?" inquired the comtesse.

"About two thousand a year, and nearly twenty years' accumulations," replied the abbé, with a prodigious yawn.

"Certainly that seems worth a little trouble. If I can help you in any way with lord Stair, let me know. When do you start again after the chevalier?"

"As soon as I wake, whenever that may be. And I will sleep now, my dear Yvonne, if there are no more explanations required. It is not worth while to go to bed. Don't trouble about me in the morning, but tell your man to have my things ready."

"Just as you like," replied the comtesse, rising and kissing her brother. "That sofa is pretty comfortable."

The abbé took off his coat and waistcoat, wrapped himself up in his dressing-gown, and lay down on the sofa to sleep the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONVENT OF "LES FILLES DE STE. MARIE THÉRÈSE."

THE morning after madame de Valincour's reception Gwynett had occasion to ride out to the regent's park at Monceaux, which had been thrown open on certain days to the public. His business was with the chief engineer of the fountains and ornamental waters, and this functionary was at the moment supervising some repairs of urgency in one of the warmest conservatories. Finding the temperature inside the structure a little oppressive, Gwynett preferred to postpone his business till he could transact it outside. He therefore asked the engineer to rejoin him on one of the terraces as soon as he could be spared, and seated himself to watch the strollers who had been tempted by the brightness of the morning to inspect the beauties of the regent's pleasure-gardens.

A few yards away, a couple of little boys were playing about one of the bronze garden-seats which were placed at intervals along the terrace. The lads were of about the same size and height, but one was partially deformed, looked in very bad health, and moved slowly and painfully. The other boy's face struck Gwynett by its extreme beauty, and he at once recollected it as that of the little sleeper whom Sanson had taken him upstairs to see at the house in the Rue St. Louis.

The deformed boy seemed to be a *protégé* of little Charlot, and the latter's evident consideration and affection for his invalid companion interested and pleased Gwynett a good deal. He had been watching them play for a short time, and was on the point of getting up to join them, when the garden-seat was suddenly upset through the two boys choosing to sit on the back of it at the same time. It fell over, carrying the lads with it, and a loud scream followed from Charlot. Hastening up, Gwynett found both

children on their backs, while Charlot's right hand had been caught by the back-rail of the heavy seat, and crushed into the gravel. The other youngster was more frightened than hurt.

Gwynett lifted the seat off Charlot's hand and took the screaming child on his knee, just as Sanson, accompanied by another man, came running up.

"Eh! M. de Starhemberg," he ejaculated, "what has happened to the little one? Courage, my child! It is not so very bad, the pain, eh?"

"I am afraid he got a hard squeeze," replied Gwynett, who was holding the injured hand within his own, "and he will most likely lose some of the nails. But I don't think any bone is broken."

The child struggled bravely to stop his crying, but could not repress the convulsive trembling and writhing caused by the pain of the injury. The fingers were already purple and swollen, and bleeding in two or three places from under the nails.

"It would be best to get a carriage, and take him back to Paris," remarked Sanson's companion, whose extreme general seediness of appearance was in marked contrast to the other's somewhat gaudy attire. "There is no surgeon about here, and the hand looks as if it wanted dressing."

"There are no livery stables either, that I know of," replied Sanson. "What is to be done? It will keep him so long in pain to carry him home on my shoulder."

"Perhaps I can help in the matter," said Gwynett. "Give me your hand, little one."

The child, who was still on Gwynett's knee, reluctantly allowed his fingers to be opened and the adhering fragments of dirt and gravel to be gently brushed off. Then Gwynett placed the injured fingers in his own mouth with one hand, while he rested the other on the top of the child's head.

In a few seconds the little sufferer's trembling and writhing ceased, his ashen face regained its color, and his eyes closed. His head fell back against Gwynett's shoulder, and he sank into a deep sleep. Sanson and his companion looked on open-mouthed, without saying a word.

After a couple of minutes Gwynett took Charlot's

fingers out of his mouth, and breathed several times on the top of the sleeping child's head. Then he wrapped up the injured hand in his handkerchief, and turned to Sanson.

"He has no pain now," he said, "and he will not wake for some hours; do what you like. When he does, I think you will find his hand much better, if not quite well. You need not interfere in any way with it till I see it again. I will call at your house to-night, if it will be convenient to you."

Sanson was quite overcome with astonishment and gratitude.

"I have no words to thank you, monsieur," he said fervently. "What monsieur does is surely miraculous."

"Not at all," replied Gwynett. "It is only some sort of peculiarity one has, which comes in useful for this kind of thing. I have met half a dozen people who have much the same gift, and I daresay there are hundreds—yourself among them, perhaps—who possess it without knowing it."

Sanson opened his mouth as if to speak, and then hesitated.

"What is it, monsieur?" asked Gwynett.

"Monsieur, it is this other poor boy here—Charlot is so fond of him. If monsieur could do anything for him——"

"What is the matter with him?"

"For one thing, his back is diseased. And he was always delicate. Come hither, Justin."

Gwynett looked at the little invalid's face and asked, "Have you any pain, my boy?"

"Yes, monsieur, always. Sometimes it is worse than at others. Here," and he put his hand round to his back.

"And your head?"

"That aches most days, monsieur. It aches now."

Gwynett passed the sleeping Charlot over to Sanson, and took Justin between his knees. He placed his right hand against the lad's back where he had complained of the pain, and rested the other on his head.

"Look at me, Justin," he said, smiling.

The child fixed his hollow eyes on the speaker's with a

certain wondering earnestness. Then the ghost of a smile responded to Gwynett's.

"Listen, Justin. I am going to take away the pain."

"Yes, monsieur."

"It is going. It is nearly gone."

"Yes, monsieur."

"It is gone altogether. You feel quite comfortable."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Go to sleep."

Justin's eyes closed, his breath came slowly and regularly, and he seemed to sleep standing. Gwynett gently rubbed with his finger the skin amongst the roots of the hair just over the forehead, and the lad's eyes opened again.

"You can hear me, Justin?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"From to-day you will have no more pain, either in your back or your head. You will sleep well. Do you hear?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Shut your eyes."

The lad did so, and Gwynett blew sharply on his eyelids. Justin started slightly, and woke up.

"What was the last thing I said to you, my boy?" asked Gwynett.

"Monsieur said, 'Go to sleep.'"

Sanson was about to interrupt, but Gwynett motioned to him to be silent.

"It is perfectly right," said he, aside. "Say nothing. We must see how matters turn out. Occasionally I have found this sort of thing have a curiously good effect, but not always."

At this moment the engineer came up, and announced himself as ready for business. He noticed Charlot's bandage, and was told what had occurred.

"Do you happen, M. Leloir," asked Gwynett, "to be able to spare any kind of vehicle to take the child back to Paris?"

"There is a pony-chaise here, which is quite at monsieur's service, if that will do."

Sanson's seedy friend offered to take a message to the stables, and was despatched thither, while Gwynett exe-

cuted his commission with the engineer. The latter then went away, saying that the chaise would be ready at the lodge. Gwynett went back with this information to Sanson, who was sitting with Charlot asleep on his knee.

"Your friend will no doubt go to the lodge with the chaise, monsieur," said Gwynett, "so I will say adieu for the present."

"I am infinitely indebted to monsieur. But I should like to say that that person is only an acquaintance. We met by accident in the park. His name is Lambert. In my official position I am obliged to know all sorts of people, as monsieur may suppose. But I do not call them my friends."

The speaker's combined conceit, dandyism, and unaffected sincerity had always rather amused Gwynett, and he replied good-naturedly,

"Naturally, monsieur."

"This Lambert is really one of M. d'Argenson's spies, who was dismissed for drunkenness, and who sponges upon me when he is in low water. But just at present he seems to have found some employment again, and he is sufficiently in funds to repay to-day a small sum he owed me."

"I congratulate you so far," replied Gwynett.

He patted little Justin on the head, took a final look at Charlot, and went off to spend an hour or two in exploring the gardens and the sub-tropical conservatories.

It continued a very fine morning, and Gwynett decided to ride home leisurely by way of Chaillot, and lunch there. Arrived at the village, he made his way to the little inn, and was shown upstairs to a pleasant room overlooking the back garden of the house. To this, access was obtained by a flight of steps from the casement window, which was wide open. At the bottom of the garden there was a high wall, extending some distance to the right and left, and over-arched with the spreading branches of trees on the other side. Some of these, evergreen oaks and beech-trees, still retained their foliage.

Under the wall, and partly hidden by some intervening shrubs, Gwynett noticed a man standing and looking up towards the foliage which overhung the coping of the wall. Amongst this foliage there came once or twice a

flash of white or color, which suggested that some member of the opposite sex was leaning over the wall from the other side, and talking to the man behind the bushes.

When the waiter came in with Gwynett's lunch, he asked casually about the premises which lay beyond the garden wall.

"Monsieur," replied the waiter, "it is the convent of the 'Filles de Ste. Marie Thérèse.'"

"True—I had forgotten that. I think I have heard that the queen of England * is rather fond of staying there now and then."

"Yes, monsieur," replied the waiter, nothing loth to gossip. "She is there now, as it happens. It suits her better than St. Germain, so they say. And it seems, also, that someone is hiding in M. de Lauzun's empty house a little farther to the left, although nobody is seen to go in or out. That house too, like this, goes up to the convent wall, as I daresay monsieur knows."

The waiter retired, and Gwynett addressed himself to his meal. Just at this juncture a voice from someone in the garden below the window asked in a sour tone,

"Are you going to keep me all day, there?"

The voice seemed familiar to Gwynett, and looking out of the casement, he recognized Sanson's companion on the terrace at Monceaux. A second complaint, couched in still more discontented terms, elicited some reply from the man at the bottom of the garden (to whom it appeared to be addressed), and Gwynett saw again some object like a woman's cap among the branches over the wall. Then the man came from behind the bush, and walked forward to meet the first speaker. The sun fell full on his face, and as he removed his battered hat, apparently to brush away something which had fallen on it, Gwynett noticed that he had a row of scars from the chin to the forehead, and a strong weal running from nose to ear across the right cheek.

"The deuce!" he muttered, with sudden enlightenment, "that is my work, to a certainty. It is the fellow who fell upon me with Grivois that night in the Rue St. Antoine. Birds of a feather, evidently. I wonder what rascality is hatching here, of all places in the world?"

*The Widow of James II.

The two men entered the ground-floor of the inn, and Gwynett, happening to glance out of the side window of the room a minute afterwards, saw the pair walking along the high-road towards Paris. He went on with his lunch, and, as soon as he had finished, lit his pipe and stepped down into the garden to stroll about for a little before resuming his ride. After a turn or two he sauntered towards the wall at the bottom of the garden, and sat down on a rustic seat which he found behind the bushes.

Looking for a moment on the ground, his eye fell on a gold coin which lay half-covered by his boot. He stooped to pick it up, and found that it was a louis d'or. He rubbed a little dirt off it, and had just slipped it into his waistcoat pocket, when a voice over his head ejaculated,

“Hé! M. Berthon!”

Gwynett rose, turned round, and found that the speaker was a stylish young person with the air of a lady's-maid, who was leaning over the top of the wall under cover of a heavy branch of beech. He raised his hat with a smile, and the girl stammered in some confusion,

“I beg monsieur's pardon—I thought it was——”

Gwynett finished the interrupted sentence by saying,

“M. Berthon? He has gone away, mademoiselle. But I am here to supply his place. It is about your louis d'or, is it not?”

“Yes, monsieur,” replied the girl, quite unsuspectingly.

“Have you only missed one, mademoiselle?” asked Gwynett, drawing a bow at a venture.

“Only one, monsieur.”

Gwynett noticed that the girl looked at her hand, and he asked promptly,

“Are you quite sure, mademoiselle? Count—how many have you in your hand?”

“Four, monsieur. There is only one short.”

“Five louis!” thought Gwynett. “What is afoot, for that seedy scoundrel to be bestowing five louis on a maid in a convent? There is something behind this.” He went on aloud, taking his *trouvaille* out of his pocket,

“This is it, mademoiselle. How did you come to drop it?”

“I slipped, monsieur, just as I was getting off this heap

of firewood, and my closed hand struck the top of the wall. I suppose the louis must have jerked out then, but I did not notice it till I got back to the house."

Gwynett decided to pursue his investigations a little further, and remarked in a confidential tone,

"It is lucky I saw Berthon pick it up. The shabby fellow would have pocketed it and gone off with it but for me. I thought you would come back for it, so I took it from him and waited for you."

The girl reddened with pleasure at this consideration on the part of so attractive a cavalier, and said,

"Monsieur is very kind. I was afraid I had lost it altogether."

"Between ourselves," remarked Gwynett, as he handed up the gold coin, "Berthon ought to have given you double, according to my notions. I am quite sure he did not tell me half of your news—and I think you deserve another five louis for the other half."

He leisurely drew out a handful of louis from his purse, and turned them over on his palm. The girl's eyes sparkled. Gwynett looked up, and said gallantly,

"Really, mademoiselle, you are so pretty a girl that I can scarcely believe Berthon's account of your position here. What is the real truth of the matter?"

"Monsieur, I am one of her majesty's maids—to wait upon the *dames d'atours*. But as a matter of fact, when we come here there is no ceremony, and we often wait upon the queen ourselves."

"And do you prefer this place to St. Germain?"

"No, indeed, monsieur. It is dull enough there, but here it is being buried alive."

Gwynett nodded, and jingled his louis d'or.

"And what is it that shabby Berthon wants to keep to himself this morning?" he asked negligently.

"Oh! monsieur, it is only about M. de chevalier. He came in last night from M. de Lauzun's house, over the wall, as before, and this time it was to say good-bye to the queen."

"Naturally," remarked Gwynett, who recognized the importance of this piece of gossip.

"The queen cried a good deal," continued the girl, "and there was a special service in the chapel afterwards."



He went away this morning—at least, the coachman told me they would be gone before daylight.”

“Evidently a flight,” thought Gwynett, “and presumably for the coast.” He went on aloud,

“There is a pretty good main road to Alençon.”

“They are going to take by-roads till they get near Dreux,” said the girl, “and travel slowly—so the coachman said. That is to escape notice.”

“And who goes with the chevalier?”

“I suppose he and M. Macdonald will be quite alone till they get to St. Malo. All the others are travelling separately.”

“A very good plan,” assented Gwynett. “It is rather curious, is it not, that M. de Lauzun should be helping the chevalier out of France?”

“Why, monsieur?”

“Because, as it happens, he helped him into it. That was twenty-seven years ago, when M. de Lauzun carried the chevalier, as a little baby, away from London by night, when the Revolution broke out. Well, I must not keep you any longer. Here are the other five louis that fellow Berthon ought to have given you. The next time I shall come alone, and leave him behind. I shall throw a note over, and you can put your answer amongst the moss on the top of the wall.”

“That will do very well, monsieur.”

Gwynett bowed an adieu, waved his hat, and went off to settle his bill. Then he rode away towards Paris, keeping a sharp look-out for Berthon and his companion, and wondering very much who had supplied the former with his five louis d’or.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW LORD STAIR MADE HIMSELF EASY AGAIN.

ENTERING Paris just before the dusk began to close in, Gwynett saw, a little way in front of him, the two men of the *auberge* at Chaillot, and he slackened pace to a walk to see what became of them. They went on till they came to the courtyard of lord Stair's hôtel in Rue St. Antoine, where they were met by an officer who was coming in the opposite direction. The three men engaged in earnest conversation for a few minutes, and then entered the hôtel.

This seemed to Gwynett to suggest a possible explanation of the mystery of the money, and he began to ask himself whether it would not be well to go straight to M. de Torcy or the regent with an account of what he had discovered. He rode away to leave his horse at his livery stables in the Rue St. Louis, and returned to the Rue St. Antoine just in time to see the ambassador enter his carriage, accompanied by the officer, and drive away in the direction of the Palais-Royal.

"That saves me the trouble," he thought. "He has gone straight to monseigneur to demand that the chevalier shall be arrested and sent back to Lorraine. But I, should rather like to know who the officer is."

He went up to the concierge's lodge, and asked if lord Stair was at home. The porter replied that he had just gone out to pay a visit to the regent.

"Was he alone?" asked Gwynett.

"No, monsieur. Colonel Douglas was with him."

Gwynett returned to the Palais-Royal, and entered the laboratory. He had been there about half an hour when the regent came in, accompanied by M. de Torcy, and apparently very much amused.

"Ah! here is M. de Starhemberg," he said, laughing. "That is lucky, as I can tell both of you the story together. I know M. de Starhemberg is a very bottomless

pit for discretion, and it is really a comfort to unbosom oneself to someone who will not scold me for blabbing. Sit down, marquis."

M. de Torcy and Gwynett exchanged greetings, and the former said,

"Well, monseigneur, I am all attention, although I fail to realize the possibility of milord Stair being amusing under any conceivable circumstances."

"I did not say intentionally, marquis. But you shall judge for yourself. This is the affair."

The regent proceeded to narrate the scene of the night before at madame de Valincour's, and made no secret of his delight at the ambassador's discomfiture. Then he added that he had just come from an interview with lord Stair, who had called to reiterate his regrets for the unfortunate mistake made by Colonel Douglas.

"He brought the colonel himself to emphasize his apologies," proceeded the regent, "and I do hope we shall have a little peace at last about the affairs of the chevalier. He told me he was now assured, from more recent information, that M. de St. George had at present no intention of quitting Lorraine, and that in consequence he felt at liberty to discontinue the surveillance he had hitherto been obliged to exercise over the chevalier's proceedings. Finally, he said that he hoped all immediate occasion for troubling me with the matter had ceased, and that I would consider he was himself quite at ease about it, for which I devoutly thanked him."

Gwynett recognized that this piece of news put so serious a complexion upon matters that he had better tell his own story at once.

"Monseigneur," he said, "if that is what lord Stair wishes you to believe, it is a little curious that he should have learnt, half an hour before coming to you, that M. le chevalier de St. George is now on his way to St. Malo, having left Chaillot, where he has been in hiding, early this morning."

The regent sprang up from his chair.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed.

"If you will listen, monseigneur, I think you will find that it is so."

Gwynett narrated the events of the day at Monceaux

and Chaillot, and wound up by describing the short but significant meeting between the two spies and Colonel Douglas outside the ambassador's house.

The regent took the news rather seriously.

"It seems quite certain," he remarked, "that if this man Berthon told Colonel Douglas anything of the Chaillot affair, Douglas would tell milord Stair."

"You may be equally certain, monseigneur, that Berthon is not the sort of fellow to have louis d'or to throw about on his own account. Somebody else is finding the money, and prettily liberally, that is clear."

"No one but milord Stair can have the slightest interest in the chevalier's movements," mused the regent. "Unless, by the way, this Douglas is playing some game on his own account. But that is hardly compatible with his keen hunting down of M. Gaultier at madame de Valincour's."

"I think I ought to mention," put in M. de Torcy, "that a few days ago the queen* asked me to lend her a chaise for a short time, saying she wanted to be able to drive about the neighborhood of the convent without being recognized either by using her own carriages with the royal arms upon them, or by having to hire one. Probably, it was wanted for this very scheme."

The regent walked up and down the laboratory in a very undecided frame of mind, and finally rang the bell for a servant.

"Ask M. l'abbé Dubois to be good enough to come here," he said.

The servant went off, and in a few minutes the abbé presented himself.

"Abbé," said the regent, "you were present last night at milord Stair's little fiasco. Listen to the sequel, if M. de Starhemberg will not mind the trouble of telling his story over again."

Gwynett did as requested, and the abbé listened with the greatest attention. The regent added his own and M. de Torcy's news, and looked to the abbé for his verdict.

"What does it mean?" he asked. "Speak freely before M. de Starhemberg. He has done us all too many services not to be included in the discussion."

"M. de Starhemberg has given us his facts," replied

*The Widow of James II.

Dubois. "I should like him to say if, in addition, he has formed any opinions."

"There is one circumstance I have not yet mentioned," replied Gwynett, "and M. l'abbé can put his own construction upon it. He is aware that an attempt was made to assassinate me a little while back——"

"Why did I not hear of that?" interrupted the regent.

"It was not necessary, monseigneur—especially as M. l'abbé and myself agreed, after talking the matter over, that it was hardly likely to occur again."

The ghost of a smile flitted over the abbé's impenetrable face, and he nodded affirmation.

"On the occasion in question, monseigneur, I killed one of my assailants on the spot, and the other ran away, rather damaged. It was he who paid the girl the five louis. His companion's name appears to be Lambert."

Dubois pricked up his ears at this.

"Describe them, M. le chevalier," he said promptly, taking out his note-book.

Gwynett did so. The abbé made a few rapid memoranda, and left the room for a moment. Then he returned, saying,

"All three shall be watched. If either Douglas or Lambert or Berthon leave Paris to-day in the direction of Alençon, we shall know what it means."

"And that is——?" asked the regent.

"Evidently that either milord Stair or Douglas, or both, intend some mischief to the chevalier de St. George. Otherwise, he would at once have insisted on his arrest."

"You are quite right, abbé. But you scarcely suppose either of them would go to extremes?"

"Why not? There will never be such another chance for the English Government to get rid of their bogey for good and all."

"Get rid of the chevalier? Assassinate him?"

"Of course—what would be the use of doing anything less?"

"But it would be monstrous! Think of the scandal, even if he failed!"

"Nothing of the sort, monseigneur. Milord Stair is really beginning to be quite clever. He has just now carefully told you that the chevalier is keeping quiet in Lor-

raine, and that he himself has no further apprehensions in the matter. If anything happens, it will be in some out-of-the-way place with some nobody or other, who gets into a squabble with certain peaceable travellers on the same road—to wit, Colonel Douglas or his two henchmen. If the said nobody gets knocked on the head, and turns out afterwards to be the chevalier de St. George, milord Stair will of course be the most astonished man in the world. Nothing could be more simple—or more convenient.”

“We must prevent such a thing at all costs!” exclaimed the regent.

“How? If you interfere to stop milord Stair’s emissaries, or to send protection to the chevalier, you are quite obviously associating yourself with his flight, which is a violation of the treaty of Utrecht. If you overtake the chevalier, and send him back to Lorraine, the English will want to know how he came to be travelling in M. de Torcy’s carriage, and how his walking likeness happened to go straight to the house of madame de Valincour last night. Besides, it would be exclusively embarrassing to detect milord Stair in trying to bamboozle the regent of France. We should be all blushing when we met each other—which would make people stare.”

The regent was quite put out with the abbé’s logic.

“*Sangdieu!*” he exclaimed, “are we to do nothing? Let the English go to the devil! M. de St. George shall not come to harm if I can help it; and as to stopping him, the sooner he is out of France the better for everybody.”

“I daresay he will be out of it fast enough if you leave matters alone,” remarked the abbé, with frank brutality.

The regent for once blazed up in real anger.

“M. l’abbé,” he said sharply, “try and understand that a son of France owes something to those who have gone before him and to those who will come after him—if not to himself. M. de St. George is of our own house,* he is our guest, he is in misfortune; and even if we stand aside while he tries to mount his father’s throne, it will not exactly become us to allow him to be butchered on the steps leading to it.”

The abbé was not at all disturbed by this outbreak.

*It has already been mentioned that the Pretender (like the regent) was a great-grandson of Henri IV.

"I have said nothing to the contrary, monseigneur," he remarked placidly. "Let M. de St. George be warned, or protected, or arrested, as much as you please. But it must be with your left hand and not with your right—and you must not let your right hand know what your left is doing."

"It is easy to say so, abbé. But time presses, and whom can we set to work who will not be known as our agent? We are quite in the dark as to details, the affair will require someone to be in the secret, and that someone must have all his wits about him, while at the same time he must be a person who is quite in the background."

"Monseigneur, you know so exactly who is wanted, that I am amazed to see you do not know where to put your hand upon him."

M. de Torcy burst out laughing.

"I quite agree with M. l'abbé," he said. "Nevertheless, it is rather amusing that we all go to M. de Starhemberg when we are in a fix."

"M. de Starhemberg!" echoed the regent. "What a blockhead I am! You are the very man for the business, chevalier, if you can see your way to undertake it. You know the three rascals who are in it, and if they know you, it is entirely as a private person, who does what he chooses and is accountable to no one."

It was not a habit of Gwynett's to be visited by hesitations in matters of this sort. So he simply replied,

"I am quite at your service, monseigneur. But I should like to know exactly what is to be done. I take it the how, when, and where must be decided by myself, according to circumstances."

At this moment a letter was brought to the abbé, which he read to the others. It was from M. d'Argenson, lieutenant-general of police, and reported that Douglas, Lambert, and Berthon had just left the hôtel Stair. The colonel was in a chaise, while the other two were on horseback, dressed as troopers, and the three had gone in the direction of the Porte St. Honoré.

"That settles matters, one would think," commented the abbé, "and the sooner M. de Starhemberg is *en route* the better."

"And my instructions?" asked Gwynett.

"Chevalier, what you have to do is to get M. de St. George out of France, either east or west, without mishap, and without compromising our government. As to the means, you have *carte blanche*. For the chevalier de St. George, this will be your credential," and the regent handed his signet-ring to Gwynett. "For other people, I will give you an open order."

The regent sat down, and wrote on a sheet of paper:

"November 10th, 1715.

"PALAIS-ROYAL,

"To whom it may concern.

"Obey all orders of the bearer.

"PHILIPPE."

"Countersign, M. le marquis," he said to de Torcy.

The marquis added his signature, and the regent handed the paper to Gwynett. The latter glanced at it, and remarked,

"Monseigneur, that paper might be a little too convenient for the wrong person, if I happened to get my throat cut, or if it got adrift in some unforeseen way."

"What do you suggest then, chevalier?"

"Add to it, 'Current for one month from date,' monseigneur. That will put some limit to the privileges conferred by it."

"Very good," assented the regent, making the suggested addition. "Here are two hundred louis for emergencies. The order will get you more whenever you want it. How soon can you start?"

"At once, monseigneur. I have a call to make in the Rue St. Louis, but it will not delay me more than five minutes."

The party left the laboratory, and the abbé Dubois muttered to himself, as he walked off to his own rooms,

"It is not quite what I should have liked. But I suppose the comtesse knows what she is about."

He took out of his pocket a little note, dated that morning, which he read, and put back again. It ran:

"DEAR ABBÉ:

"If you hear a clucking from the Bar-le-duc nest, do not disturb yourself. The eggs will addle.

"Y. DE V."

CHAPTER XVII.

AT NONANCOURT.

IN the afternoon of the day following his departure from Paris, Gwynett rode into the little village of Nonancourt, about nineteen leagues from Paris on the road to Alençon, and three leagues beyond Dreux. He had come by way of the latter place, along an atrociously bad road, and had so far been able to learn nothing of the Pretender or of Colonel Douglas's party.

But this did not surprise him, as the latter were quite as likely as not to be taking the route of Ivry and St. André, which happened to be in very much better condition, while the chevalier would in any case be avoiding the main roads up to this stage of his journey. The fact of the two routes converging upon Nonancourt had decided Gwynett to make this place his first stoppage, in order to ascertain if possible whether the pursuers and pursued were in front of him or behind.

He therefore put up his horse for an hour at the only inn in the place, which was the post-house also, and entered into a little diplomatic gossip with the stablemen. But as nothing corresponding with what he expected seemed to have been seen, he hired a fresh horse, and rode twelve miles farther to Verneuil, on the chance that either Douglas or the chevalier had passed through Nonancourt in the dark. Neither at Vernueil nor at Tillières, about half-way between, was anything to be learned of the travellers, so he returned at dusk to the post-house at Nonancourt, and ordered his dinner and a bed.

The "Cerf Doré" was a comfortable building, kept by one madame l'Hôpital, who had previously been post-mistress at La Ferté. There were two or three private rooms to be had in the inn, and Gwynett secured one of these in order to lessen the chance of being recognized by Lambert or Berthon, should either of them happen to arrive there with Douglas.

While smoking his pipe in this room after his meal, it occurred to him that in the course of his interview with the princesse Palatine at St. Cloud this village of Nonancourt had been mentioned as the home of the maid he had seen there, Sanson's niece.

"The princesse certainly said that her people lived here," he mused. "They might possibly be useful in an emergency, if one only knew who they were. But the name escapes me altogether. Ah! now I recollect—it was Tausch."

He made an excuse to send for the landlady, and asked casually if any family of the name in question lived thereabouts.

"I know whom monsieur means," replied madame l'Hôpital. "It is really the people of Grandpré at Boissy-en-Drouais, along the hillside to the right of Dreux. Their mother's name was Tausch—Germans of the Palatinate. The old people were in the household of madame duchesse d'Orléans, and one of the granddaughters is there now."

"Thekla, I suppose?" put in Gwynett, recollecting that this was the name of the girl he had seen at St. Cloud.

"No, monsieur, Bertha. Thekla is her sister, and she is at home at Grandpré. But a little while ago Bertha fell ill, and Thekla went to take her place for a short time with madame at St. Cloud. Monsieur has perhaps seen her there?"

Gwynett nodded affirmatively.

"And what is the present household at Grandpré?" he asked.

"Monsieur, besides Thekla there is only the mother there, madame Martigny. She manages the farm. They used to be a large family, but all the rest are dead now. Madame Martigny's sister in Paris, madame Sanson de Longval, was the last."

"My landlady of the Rue des Poissonniers, no doubt," commented Gwynett mentally.

"It is rather lonely for her with such a big house as Grandpré," went on madame l'Hôpital, "but occasionally she lets rooms to people who come to hunt in the forest of Boissy. The seigneur of the forest, M. le baron de Baugé, will have no visitors at the château, and his son, the chevalier de Baugé, is obliged to find accommodation

for his hunting acquaintances wherever he can in the neighborhood."

"And how far is Grandpré from here, madame?"

"About a league, monsieur; just on this side of Boissy. The best road thither is from Louvilliers, which monsieur passed through on the highway from Dreux."

At this moment the sound of wheels and the clatter of horses' hoofs announced an arrival at the inn, and the landlady went off to attend to the newcomers.

Gwynett put out his light, and went to the window, which commanded a view of the courtyard before the inn door. A chaise stood in front of the porch, and a couple of dismounted troopers were holding their horses close beside it. A man in a military cloak got out of the chaise, and Gwynett, by the light of the lantern over the door, recognized colonel Douglas.

"Evidently I am first in the field," he said to himself. "Let us see what their next move will be."

He put on his hat and cloak, thrust a couple of pistols into his pockets, and went downstairs. The colonel was just entering the public room to have some refreshment, and the two troopers had gone to the stables. The full moon was high in the sky, and the night promised to be fine.

Gwynett went out into the porch, and found that the chaise from which Douglas had alighted was still outside, with the horse in the shafts. So far it appeared that the colonel was not going to remain at the inn. Gwynett strolled round to the stables, keeping in the shade, and observed that the riding horses had been unsaddled and put in the stalls. Presently the troopers came out without noticing Gwynett, went into the house, and rejoined the colonel in the dining-room.

Gwynett walked quietly to the front of the inn, and looked in through the dining-room window. The three men were engaged in earnest conversation, evidently in low tones. The two troopers were Lambert and Berthon. Presently they retired, and the colonel was left alone to his meal of bread and meat and wine.

Gwynett went round to the stables again, under the pretext of seeing how his own horse was faring. He strolled toward the stalls where the troopers' horses had

been placed, and found that, just at the moment, none of the stable helps were about or in sight. He noticed the troopers' saddles, with their holsters and pistols, hanging on the stall-posts, and decided that a little precaution would not be amiss. He therefore took the two pairs of pistols from the holsters, shook the powder out of the pans, and dipped each of them in a bucket of water which stood on the floor. Then he wiped the pistols, returned them to the holsters, and strolled back to the house.

Noticing that the colonel was still sitting alone at the table, Gwynett went to his own room, and again summoned the landlady. When she came, Gwynett shut the door and inquired,

"Madame, may I ask you if you know anything of the three persons who arrived just now?"

"No, monsieur."

"What are the two horsemen doing at the present moment?"

"They are eating their supper in the kitchen, monsieur, and standing treat to the hostlers."

"Do you expect them to stay the night?"

"Their master has engaged a room for them over the stables, monsieur."

"And one for himself?"

"No, monsieur. He talks of going on as soon as he has had his supper. Is monsieur not quite satisfied with them?"

Gwynett had formed the opinion that madame l'Hôpital was a woman of considerable discretion, and he therefore replied,

"Madame, I happen to know that the two men are not exactly reputable persons, and I think it would have been better if their master had remained with them."

"I will ask for payment in advance, monsieur, and thank you for the hint."

"Do nothing of the sort, madame—your money is safe enough. What I should like to suggest to you, is to find out quietly why these men remain behind while the master goes on. Try and do that without exciting any suspicion, and let me know the result as soon as you can.

This is between ourselves, madame, and you shall not lose by it."

Gwynett carelessly took out a handful of louis d'or under the eyes of madame l'Hôpital, picked out one, and handed it to her with a request that she would furnish him with small change for it. The landlady went away quite convinced of Gwynett's *bona fides* and extreme respectability.

Presently she returned, shut the door behind her, and remarked,

"Monsieur, the two men have given out that they are here to buy horses amongst the farmers for their regiment in Paris."

"And the master?"

"He is going on to Verneuil for the same purpose."

"When?"

"As soon as he has finished his supper, monsieur."

Gwynett pondered over this information for a minute or two. Everything pointed to the chevalier travelling by way of Dreux, but there was the remote possibility that the announcement, even to the coachman at Chaillot, had been a blind, or that the route had been unexpectedly altered at the last moment. In either case the chevalier might really be following up Douglas's party along the road from St. André; and Gwynett, by confining his attention to the direction of Dreux, might miss the chevalier altogether at a critical moment. Finally he asked,

"Madame, do you happen to have a really discreet person amongst your servants—one who will do what he is told, and hold his tongue?"

The landlady looked a little surprised, but replied,

"Yes, monsieur, if my son will do. I can always trust him myself. He helps in the stables."

"Do me the favor to let me see him, madame."

The landlady went out, and came back with an honest-looking lad of sixteen or seventeen, whom Gwynett had seen in the stable-yard when he arrived.

"This is my son Hoël, monsieur," said the landlady.

Gwynett looked observantly at the lad, and feeling satisfied with the result of his scrutiny, asked him,

"You know the road to St. André, Hoël?"

"Every inch of it, monsieur."

"I want you to go along that road for a little way, and wait for a carriage to come past, with a picture painted on the panels, like this——" and he drew a rough sketch of M. de Torcy's arms with a pen upon a sheet of paper. The lad looked closely at the sketch, and nodded.

"You will ask the coachman to stop; and in case he might refuse, you had better find some place where the ground rises enough to make him walk his horses for a little distance."

"There is a steep hill just about a mile out," said the boy. "They must walk up that."

"Very good," replied Gwynett. "You will ask the traveller in the chaise this question, 'Monsieur, do you understand this?' and you will show him this note."

Gwynett wrote on the back of the paper:

"MONSIEUR,

"If you come from S.T.,* you will do well to go back there—or, at all events, to stay where you are until the writer can come to you.

"FILLES DE STE. MARIE THÉRÈSE."

"That will not tell too much to the wrong person," he thought to himself, as he handed the piece of paper to the lad.

"And if he does not understand, monsieur?"

"Then," replied Gwynett, "you will whisper to him one word—'Stair.' If, after that, he still proceeds on his journey, leave him alone, notice which road he takes, and come back to me here. Put some food in your pocket, and let nobody know what you are about."

The lad promised to carry out these instructions faithfully, and retired with the landlady. Gwynett put out his light again, and waited for some step on the part of colonel Douglas. In a quarter of an hour or so he heard a movement of the chaise, and looking out of the window he saw Douglas get into the vehicle and drive off, taking the road to the west.

Este, the family name of Maria Beatrice of Modena, the Pretender's mother. From her ancestor Guelfo IV. d'Esté (1070 A. D.) our present royal house (Esté-Guelf) is descended.

"To Verneuil, evidently," thought Gwynett. "So far good. Now for the other two."

He considered for a minute, and then, opening his valise, brought out a pair of blue spectacles, which had the effect when worn of making a surprising change in his appearance.

"It is lucky one starts with a poor light," he soliloquized. "One could not quite rely upon this sort of thing in the daytime."

He went downstairs, keeping his hat well over his eyes, and turning the collar of his cloak up as if for warmth. Meeting the landlady in the entrance-hall, he asked in an undertone what the two men were doing.

"They went out, monsieur, about half an hour before the officer left."

"Mounted, or on foot?"

"On foot, monsieur, and towards the bridge."

This meant the road from Dreux, which crossed the river Avre a little way outside Nonancourt. Gwynett went to the stables, saddled his horse, and rode away in the direction indicated.

"The chief trouble," he reflected, as he passed through the village, "is that fellow Lambert. Everything depends on whether he recognizes me or not. He may not know who and what I am, but he must certainly know that I am not an *habitué* of lord Stair's hôtel. And if Sanson is aware that I am at the Palais-Royal, he has probably told Lambert so much. That would be very inconvenient. And it is decidedly awkward that, so far, one is only going on very vague suspicions. All these three fellows are perhaps merely spies, and lord Stair may be letting his bird fly with a string to his leg for some purpose of his own. It would not be at all a bad idea for him to let the chevalier go as far as St. Malo, and then get a few more birds into the trap. Probably they have a ship or two there which would be worth seizing, if the chevalier pointed them out by going on board."

By this time Gwynett, keeping a sharp look-out as he rode along, had reached the bridge over the little river Avre, on the road between Nonancourt and Dreux, by which he had arrived earlier in the day. Neither of the two men were to be seen. The moonlight was clear and

bright, and the night fine. A mile or so away on the right appeared the lights of the hamlet of St. Lubin des Jocharets, under the forest of Boissy. The road through Louvilliers to Dreux stretched away before him, but it wound a good deal, and he could not see very far along it. As a precaution he dismounted, tied his horse to a bush, and climbed down to find if the two men were hiding under the bridge. No one was there, so he remounted and went on. It was now nearly six o'clock.

About a mile farther on, the road made a sudden bend, and turning the corner, Gwynett saw in front of him two men, walking arm-in-arm.

"That promises well," he thought. "As it can scarcely be affection, it is probably drink."

He rode leisurely after the two men, who presently heard his horse's footsteps and turned round. Fortunately, the moon was directly behind Gwynett, and shone full into the men's faces. They were Lambert and Berthon.

Gwynett made up his mind as to his *rôle*, and drew rein in front of the pair.

"*Hola!* Lambert and Berthon!" he called out in a sharp, peremptory tone, and with a strong North German accent.

The two men stopped without hesitation.

"Yes, monsieur," replied Lambert.

"Which of you is Lambert?"

"I, monsieur," replied that individual.

"Where is the colonel?"

"Monsieur," replied Lambert promptly, "he has gone on to Verneuil."

"Since when?"

"Less than an hour ago, monsieur?"

"And what the plague are you doing here? Do you know, M. Berthon, that you and that girl of yours at the convent have bungled matters finely between you?"

Berthon, evidently not recognizing Gwynett, replied,

"How, monsieur? What is the matter?"

"What made you suppose the chevalier was coming by way of Dreux?"

"The girl said so, monsieur."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite sure, monsieur."

"Well, there is some mistake or some trick. We found out, not an hour after you left the hôtel Stair, that the chevalier took the route by Ivry and St. André. Either the girl was bamboozling you, or you earn your money rather clumsily, M. Berthon."

Berthon looked quite crestfallen at this rebuke, which he seemed to accept without hesitation as coming from some one initiated into all the details of colonel Douglas's mission.

"Pardon, monsieur," he stammered, "but I could only repeat what she said to us, and I feel certain she believed it herself."

"I have nothing to do with that," replied Gwynett brusquely. "The point now is to remedy the blunder. I have come as fast as I could by way of Ivry, but I have not overtaken the chevalier, so he must either be in front, or be travelling by some side-roads. What has the colonel discovered?"

"Nothing, monsieur. It seems the Pretender——"

"Get into the habit of saying 'the chevalier,' M. Berthon. There is no occasion to tell everybody we are Whigs."

"The chevalier, then, monsieur, has not passed through Nonancourt, so far as anybody knows."

"Well, and what are you doing here?"

"Watching the road from Dreux, monsieur."

"And what are your exact instructions?"

"Monsieur, we are to go on until we find a convenient place for an ambush, so as to attack the chaise without the driver getting any warning. We have masks, and are to act as simple highwaymen, demanding money from the travellers, and shooting the chevalier in the scuffle. But we are not to attack if there are two persons besides the driver—only if the chevalier is alone?"

"And if he is not?"

"Then we are to hide until he passes, and hurry on after him to Verneuil or wherever we overtake the colonel, so as to be a strong enough party."

"How are you to know the right vehicle?"

"It will have arms on the panels, monsieur, and be drawn by two grey horses."

Gwynett had now learned all that he wanted. It was

clear that an assassination was planned, and that if the chevalier came up there would be an inconvenient *éclaircissement*. So he replied,

"That is all right. I need not give you any other orders, at all events until I have seen the colonel. But we are simply wasting time here. It is the other road you must look after, so get back to Nonancourt at once. I suppose your horses are there?"

"Yes, monsieur. The colonel took a room for us at the post-house, to prevent suspicion."

"There is no harm in that. But you must mount guard in the road all night, whatever the people at the inn may think. At the worst, you must swear that you can't resist the temptation to do a little night-poaching. As for myself, I will ride on to Dreux, and see if anything is stirring. There is, of course, the off-chance that some mystification is on foot, and that there are two chaises, travelling by different routes. If the colonel by any chance comes back, tell him I will join him as soon as possible."

"Whom shall we say we have met, monsieur?"

Gwynett had of course expected this question, and was prepared with the name of one of the British agents at Nancy, a Mecklenburg gentleman in the pay of lord Cadogan at Brussels. He had incidentally heard of this personage just before starting, and knew that if he were not in Lorraine he would be in Brussels with Cadogan.

"My name is de Pless," he replied, "from Commercy. Of course you will say nothing at the inn about our meeting. I shall not know you there."

"Very good, monsieur."

"And allow me to say, M. Lambert," remarked Gwynett, who thought that a little further indulgence in drink on the part of his two companions might judiciously be encouraged, "that you seem to have had as much liquor as this business will permit of. With the next bottle you will begin to chatter, and as soon as you begin to chatter my duty will unfortunately compel me to take you into some quiet place, and blow your valuable brains out. I should regret that very much. On the other hand, here is a crown for you to spend in making the people in the stables as drunk as you can. It may be useful."

Lambert took the money with rather obvious alacrity, and went off with his companion. It was clear that neither of the pair had any suspicion of having met Gwynett before, and that they accepted his account of himself quite implicitly.

"That will do very well," thought Gwynett, as he watched them fairly on their way back to Nonancourt. "And now, if that lad Hoël is not as discreet as he looks, those two cut-throats will be none the wiser for his blabbing. But I hope the chevalier will come this way, after all. Let us see."

He rode off at a trot in the direction of Dreux, but met nothing on the road till he had passed the hamlet of Louvilliers. Then in the distance he saw a vehicle approaching, which turned out to be a chaise drawn by two grey horses. He stopped, and waited in the middle of the road till the chaise was within a score of yards. At this stage the coachman, evidently rather suspicious of the cloaked figure blocking the highway, pulled up also, and turned round to say something to the other occupant of the chaise.

Gwynett called out, "On the king's service!" and walked his horse forward towards the chaise.

The hood of the chaise had been put back, and a man in the garb of a village curé rose from his seat to see what was happening. He was lean, dark, pale, rather good-looking, and apparently from twenty-five to thirty years of age.

"What do you want?" he asked curtly.

"Monsieur," replied Gwynett, raising his hat, "I am expecting someone along this road, and you may be he. Will you permit me to look at the arms on your chaise?"

The traveller hastily threw a rug over the side of the chaise so as to conceal what might be upon the panels, and replied,

"I see no occasion for that, monsieur."

This display of caution seemed pretty conclusive to Gwynett, and he uncovered.

"Monsieur," he remarked, "the person I expect ought to know something of two letters of the alphabet—an S and a T. Do they remind you of anything?"

The traveller seemed rather taken aback at this hint.

"And if they do, monsieur, what then?"

"May I further suggest, monsieur, that you have left two other letters not long ago—M and B?"

"Why all these questions, monsieur?"

"Because, monsieur, I wish to be sure that I offer my services to the right person."

"I ask no services, monsieur."

"Possibly, monsieur. But the person I seek needs them very much, and they are offered in the name of the owner of this ring."

Gwynett handed the regent's signet to the traveller, who held it towards the lantern of the chaise, and gave a little start of recognition.

"Well, monsieur," he said, after a pause, "what is it you have to say to me?"

"Tell me, monsieur, what the letters M. B. stand for?"

"For one thing, monsieur, they are the initials of my mother's name."

"Then, monsieur," said Gwynett, leaning forward till his mouth was close to the traveller's ear, "you are——?" The rest of the question was lost in a whisper.

The traveller shrugged his shoulders.

"In France I am nothing but James Stuart," he replied.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A HIGHWAY ROBBERY.

AT this open announcement that he was in the presence of the chevalier de St. George, Gwynett glanced at the driver of the chaise.

"That is M. Macdonald, my first gentleman of the bed-chamber," said the chevalier, in answer to Gwynett's look. "One of my most faithful followers. Speak freely before him, and do me the favor to be covered."

"Monseigneur," replied Gwynett, putting on his hat, "my name is Starhemberg, and I come from monseigneur le régent to warn you of an intention to intercept you. Your escape has been made known to lord Stair, and three of his agents have come to Nonancourt to lie in wait for your passing."

"How did this happen?" asked the chevalier.

Gwynett gave a brief account of the circumstances already known to the reader.

"I am greatly indebted to yourself and to M. d'Orléans," remarked the chevalier, when Gwynett had finished. "It is evidently my mother's coachman whom that girl at the convent has wheedled out of the information. We were obliged to consult him about our route, as neither M. Macdonald nor myself knew anything of the roads between Chaillot and Alençon. And what course do you suggest now, monsieur? I suppose the first thing will be to arrest these three rascals?"

"Monseigneur, it is extremely desirable to avoid bringing you into the matter at all, or I should have availed myself of my powers and laid these fellows by the heels before now. But then one must give some reason for such a thing. It is not convenient to give the real reason, and to give none would excite suspicion. Moreover, it was not worth while taking any step until I had actually met your highness,"

"Well, what is to be done, monsieur?"

"Now that we have met, monseigneur, I think it will be easy to have the men arrested for highway robbery."

"But they have done nothing, so far."

"Exactly, monseigneur. And therefore I shall now see about their doing something. Have you any arms?"

"Macdonald has a musket under his seat, and we both have pistols."

"That will do. I will ask your highness to drive on slowly, and to pull up at a roadside Calvary about two miles from here, if I have not rejoined you before. In the meantime, I will go back to arrange matters."

Gwynett saluted, turned his horse's head towards Nonancourt, and set off at a gallop. He overtook Lambert and Berthon almost within sight of the inn, and as no one was about he called to them to stop.

The two men turned round, and in response to Gwynett's signals, retraced their steps to where he had betaken himself to the shadow of a high wall.

"Have you seen anything?" he asked, keeping up his assumed voice.

"No, monsieur."

"All the better. It looks very much as if you were right after all. Either the chevalier, or somebody passing for him, is at Louvilliers resting his horses, and will come on this way at once, if he has not already started."

"What are we to do, monsieur?"

"Carry out the colonel's instructions, of course. You have your pistols?"

"A pair each, monsieur."

"And your masks?"

"Yes, monsieur. How many people are of the party?"

"There are only the chevalier and driver, as far as I could learn at the inn. The chevalier appears to be rather ill, hardly able to keep his seat in the chaise, and he will give you no trouble. You are not instructed to do any mischief to the driver, I suppose?"

"No, monsieur, unless he makes a fuss."

"I fancy you will only have to hold a pistol towards him. I should recommend you to lay hold of the chevalier and drag him into the road. Then you can knock him on the head with your pistol butts. Don't fire except as a last

resource—one never knows who may be near enough to hear the report, and come running up to interfere.”

“That is quite true, monsieur.”

“And now to your places. Take hold of my stirrup-leathers, and run alongside me.”

Gwynett started back at a gentle trot, with the two would-be assassins running at his side. In ten minutes they had reached a place where a small thicket of high furze-bushes formed a sort of hedge for a few yards along the roadside.

“Get behind those bushes,” said Gwynett to his companions. “Wait till the chaise is close upon you, and then rush out pistol in hand. Tell the coachman to pull up, and keep his seat, on peril of his life. After that, you will know how to finish the business.”

“And what of the coachman afterwards, monsieur?”

“Oh! I suppose you will blindfold and tie him to the carriage, while you make off to join the colonel at Verneuil.”

“Very good, monsieur. And as to yourself?”

“I? Good Lord! do you suppose I am going to be mixed up with the affair? I am riding to Louvilliers on business, and if I come back and find a body in the road, with evidences of a highway robbery, why, what on earth do I know about it? Is there anything else?”

“No, monsieur.”

“Then I am off. You expect the chevalier any time during the next half hour. But if anything goes wrong, or there seems to be any change of programme, I shall come back, and let you know.”

Gwynett rode off in the direction of Louvilliers, and the two men sat down on the dead fern amongst the gorse-bushes. Nothing transpired for a quarter of an hour. At the end of that time the sound of horses’ feet became audible in the still air. The pair slipped on their masks, got their pistols ready, and waited.

Before long the chaise, drawn by the two grey horses, appeared coming on at a good pace, which was slackened as it approached the thicket of furze. The hood of the chaise was pulled over, and a traveller in the dress of a priest was barely visible as he leaned back in his seat.

As the vehicle came opposite the thicket, Lambert and

Berthon rushed out with a shout, presented their pistols at the driver, and ordered him, with a volley of threats, to keep quiet and mind his own business.

"Don't fire, gentlemen!" cried Macdonald. "I will make no resistance, I promise you."

"We'll take care of that," replied Lambert, going to one side of the chaise, while Berthon appeared at the other. "Now, M. le curé, your purse and watch, if you please."

"I have neither," came in a feeble voice from the occupant of the chaise.

"Indeed?" replied Lambert. "Let us see."

He mounted on the step, and grasped the traveller by the shoulder while Berthon told the driver to keep his seat and hold up his hands.

"Get out, monsieur," said Lambert roughly.

"I am unable to stand," replied the traveller.

"We'll help you," said Lambert. "Out with him!" he said to Berthon, who leaned over to raise the traveller.

A pair of hands shot forth like lightning, and seized the two assailants by the throat with such a strangling grip that neither of the pair had time to utter even an exclamation of surprise.

"Now, M. Macdonald!" cried the traveller.

The driver sprang up, snatched his musket from under the seat, and brought down the butt-end of it upon the heads, first of Berthon and then of Lambert, with all the force he could employ. Berthon fell like a log. But Lambert, who just at the moment made a desperate struggle to escape the choking grasp on his throat, moved sufficiently for the blow to pass from his head to his shoulder, which it fractured. He gave a yell of pain and terror as the traveller flung him down on the roadway, jumped out upon him, and twisted his two hands behind his back.

"See to the other rascal, M. Macdonald," said the traveller. "This one is safe for the present."

Macdonald got down, and turned over the body of Berthon.

"This fellow is dead, M. de Starhemberg," he said.

"Perhaps that is better for him than the galleys," replied Gwynett, who had taken off his spectacles and was now speaking in his natural voice. "If you have a piece of rope, we will tie his friend up ready for M. le prévôt."

Lambert was securely bound, and his coat tied over his head to prevent him seeing any of the subsequent proceedings. He was then laid down by the roadside, together with the body of his companion, and the chaise was driven back towards Louvilliers.

A short distance from the village, the chevalier de St. George, in the hat and cloak previously worn by Gwynett, and sitting on the latter's horse, was waiting at the roadside. The two re-exchanged the habiliments which they had been respectively wearing during the last episode, and the Pretender once more appeared in his shovel hat and priestly frock.

"Now you have carried out your plan, monsieur," said the chevalier de St. George, "what is the next step?"

"Monseigneur, you will recollect that we have still colonel Douglas to deal with, and he will certainly find out within a few hours that his two cut-throats have missed their mark. He will naturally suppose that they have been taken for ordinary robbers, and will therefore endeavor to supply their places or else try something on his own account—that is, if you proceed with your journey."

"Delay would be disastrous, monsieur."

"Nevertheless, monseigneur, I recommend you to hide somewhere till I can dispose of the colonel."

"Very good, monsieur. But it is getting late."

"I suppose, if necessary, you can sleep in the chaise?"

"Certainly. We did so last night, under some firs."

"Then, monseigneur, the best plan will be to drive into the woods up there, while I go forward to a farm I know of, where I think you can lodge for a day or two quite unobserved and unknown. As to Lambert and his companion, it would be losing time to attend to them now. They must wait. It is after six o'clock, and the farm-folk hereabouts will probably be in bed in an hour."

"I am quite in your hands, M. de Starhemberg."

"Then, monseigneur, let us go forward a little, and we shall find a side road on the left towards the forest. We will turn up that."

"Lead the way, monsieur, and M. Macdonald will drive after you."

The party turned back towards Louvilliers. At the

eastern end of the village a very bad lane left the highway at right angles, and ran to the south-west up the hillside. This lane was followed for a mile and a half, then it became an open track through the forest, and Gwynett halted on reaching a level place where a little rivulet ran across the path.

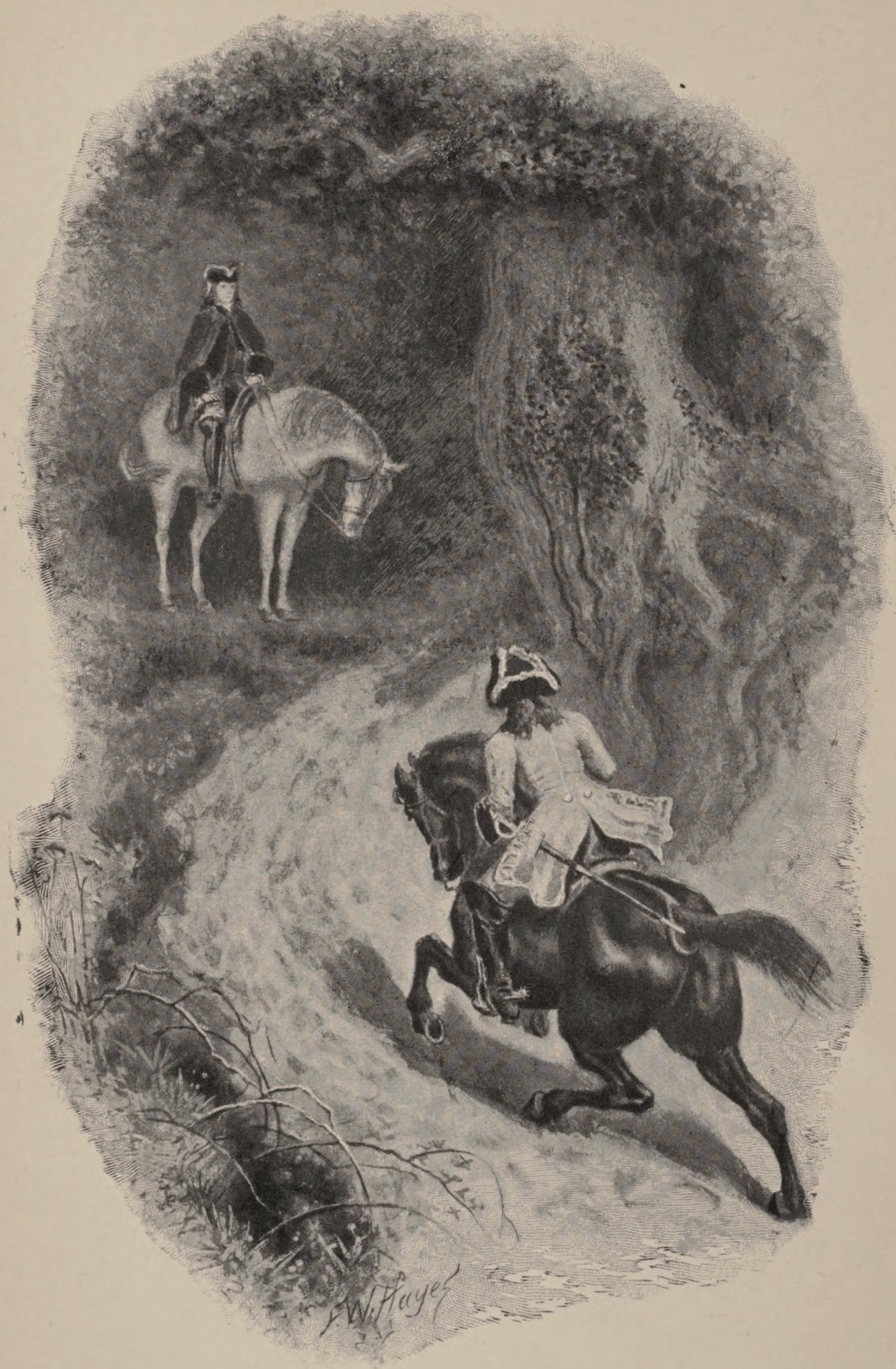
"Monseigneur," he said, "I think you had better remain here while I explore farther. That hollow filled with big holly bushes will serve very well to conceal the chaise, and if you will stay there for an hour or less, I will ride forward, and seek a safe lodging for you."

"Very good, monsieur. We have provisions with us, so shall not be inconvenienced for the present."

Macdonald led the horses of the chaise over the carpet of dead leaves into the little glade which Gwynett had pointed out, and which enabled the vehicle to be completely hidden. The chevalier and his companion began their supper upon a pasty and a bottle of wine, while Gwynett rode off to try and discover the farm of Grand-pré.

He kept to the track which they had hitherto followed until it crossed another about a mile farther on, at the edge of the forest. It was here rather high ground, and a couple of farms were in sight at some little distance, on the slope of the hill below. It seemed likely that two of the intersecting paths would lead to these buildings, and Gwynett pulled up to settle which was the more promising one to take first. Either of the farms would apparently answer the description given by madame l'Hôpital, and at the moment there did not seem to be any particular reason for choosing between them.

While Gwynett was surveying the expanse of moonlit country from his standpoint at the cross-roads, a horse's footsteps became audible, and presently a man riding a black mare came into view, approaching by the track from the right. When this man had arrived within fifty paces, Gwynett saw that he was a young fellow of about five-and-twenty, dressed in a somewhat provincial but extravagant fashion, and evidently by rank, if not by anything else, a country gentleman. He looked at Gwynett with a good deal of surprise when the latter raised his hat, and asked,



"Pardon me, monsieur, but can you direct me to the farm of Grandpré, where madame Martigny lives?"

"Madame Martigny?" echoed the stranger, in a dubious tone, and staring hard at Gwynett. "You want madame Martigny, eh?"

"I want, in the first instance, the farm of Grandpré, monsieur," replied Gwynett. "I understand madame Martigny lives there. Is she not at home at present?"

"No doubt she is at home," observed the stranger ungraciously. "What do you want with her?"

Gwynett controlled his impatience at the boorish tone and words of his interlocutor, and responded,

"That is a matter I hope to explain to her, monsieur. At present I am only desirous of learning where she lives, and I shall be extremely obliged if you will kindly inform me. I presume it is at one of the two farms I see yonder."

Something in Gwynett's tone and bearing seemed to exercise a certain influence upon the rider of the black mare, and after a pause he replied, rather reluctantly,

"Grandpré is the nearer of the two; but——"

Gwynett cut the demur short with an expression of thanks and a lift of his hat in token of leave-taking, and rode away in the direction from which the stranger had just come. The latter remained looking after Gwynett with a suspicious air, and finally, giving his mare a dissatisfied flick, disappeared into the forest.

Gwynett noticed a light in the lower windows of the farmhouse, which led him to hope that the inmates had not yet retired for the night. As he neared the building, a sudden barking from an army of dogs heralded his approach with sufficient obviousness to bring a figure into the open doorway of the porch facing him. It was that of a young girl, who quieted the dogs and then waited, a black silhouette against the light from the wood fire of the room beyond. As Gwynett rode up to the porch, he recognized Sanson's niece, whom he had seen at St. Cloud with the princesse Palatine.

"Mademoiselle Thekla Martigny, if I mistake not?" he asked, as he drew bridle before the door.

"Yes, M. de Starhemberg," replied the girl, looking

up in the moonlight, and conveying a good deal of coquettish welcome in the smile which lit up her face.

“And this is the farm of Grandpré, I presume? Can I have the honor of speaking to madame Martigny?”

The girl stepped on one side, and took hold of the bridle of Gwynett's horse.

“Enter, monsieur, if you will be so good. My mother is within, and at your service.”

CHAPTER XIX.

GRANDPRÉ.

G WYNETT dismounted and, after hitching his bridle to the porch, followed Thekla into the front room of the house. An elderly woman, with a somewhat austere cast of countenance, was sitting in a high-backed chair on the farther side of the wood fire. She looked up inquiringly at the visitor as he entered.

"Mother," said the girl, "this is M. de Starhemberg, whom you know about."

Madame Martigny rose, and executed a profound curtsy.

"Monsieur is very welcome," she said, with a slight relaxation of her previous severity of mien. "Will he do us the honor to be seated?"

She pointed to a chair opposite her own beside the deep ingle, waited till Gwynett had taken his seat, and then, at a courteous signal from him, sat down again herself.

"Madame," begun Gwynett, "I intrude upon you at a very late hour, but I have been delayed on my way hither. I have been given to understand that you let lodgings occasionally, and the object of my visit is to ask if it would be convenient to you to accommodate two friends of mine with rooms for a day or two."

Madame Martigny bowed, and seemed to hesitate a little before replying.

"Monsieur's friends are no doubt gentlemen from Paris?" she asked, in a slightly dubious tone.

Gwynett noticed that Thekla frowned at this inquiry, and tapped her foot on the floor impatiently.

"No, madame," he replied, "they are from the provinces."

"Monsieur will pardon the question, but he will understand that the ways of gentlemen from Paris are not al-

together the ways of farming folk in the country. If I were alone it would not matter. But I have a very silly daughter," she added, with a severe glance at Thekla.

The girl reddened, and remarked with a vexed laugh,

"Monsieur will understand that my mother looks upon all gentlemen from Paris as ogres, and all country girls as little children who are ready to be eaten up without saying a word."

"Monsieur will understand that I have to supply common sense and self-respect for two people," retorted madame Martigny. "In the meantime, Thekla, you had better give monsieur's horse a mouthful of hay."

The girl said no more, but went out into the porch. Gwynett recognized that he had to deal with a somewhat critical personage, and began to suspect the reason for it.

"Madame," he replied, "your hesitation is very intelligible, and I do not say you are wrong; but my two friends will, I think, be too much occupied with their own affairs even to pay mademoiselle the compliments to which her good looks entitle her—and which I suspect she has been in the habit of receiving."

"Monsieur," said madame Martigny, "that is just it. Thekla is too pretty to be left in the way of young gentlemen who desire nothing better than to make fools of young girls who are below them in station. That is why, for the last two years, I have taken no lodgers. Our family has always been proud of its good name, and I do not wish it to be lost—while I am alive, at all events. Bertha, Thekla's sister, is in good hands, as monsieur perhaps knows. Madame duchesse d'Orléans is very particular in her household. But out here everything is dull for young people, I have no doubt, and—I am quite sure monsieur will excuse what I have said."

"Madame, permit me to assure you that I should not interest myself on behalf of anyone of whom I had a bad opinion. It would of course have been easy for my friends to stay at the 'Cerf Doré' at Nonancourt, where I am myself. But they prefer something quite retired, if it can be arranged."

"Such poor accommodation as we have is quite at the service of monsieur's friends. When will it be required?"

"Could they be received to-night, madame? They are on the road between here and Louvilliers."

"Certainly, monsieur."

"Then, madame, I will go and let them know of your obliging consent. Perhaps you will allow me to add to what I just now remarked—about my friends preferring retirement—that the less said about their being here the better. One knows that in country places people's kindness and hospitality sometimes leads to visits being paid, or invitations given——"

"Be easy, monsieur. No one will intrude upon the gentlemen, and they need not be seen even by our farm servants unless they choose."

"Very good, madame."

"May one ask your friends' names, monsieur?"

"Macdonald, madame. You would not suppose them to be brothers; but it is surprising how unlike each other members of a family contrive to be occasionally. There will be room in your outhouses for their chaise and two horses, no doubt?"

"Plenty of room, monsieur."

A few words were exchanged as to terms, and then Gwynett rose.

"Madame," he said, "I will direct my friends here, and then return to Nonancourt. I wish you good night."

He went out, and found the girl in the porch, holding his horse's bridle.

"You may expect the messieurs Macdonald in an hour or less, mademoiselle, and I trust they will put madame and yourself to no inconvenience."

"Ah! they are coming, then?" asked Thekla, in a satisfied tone.

"Yes. I am now going back to direct them on their way."

"May one ask how monsieur found us himself?"

Gwynett had just mounted, and he leaned over to answer this question in a lower tone than he had used before.

"Mademoiselle, it is perhaps lucky you did not ask me that before madame Martigny."

"Why, monsieur?"

"Because I might have replied that I was directed here

by a person who seemed to be coming from Grandpré—on a black mare.”

The girl turned very red, and her mouth half opened with a frightened look as Gwynett raised his hat, and rode off. Then she shrugged her shoulders, smiled to herself, and went into the house.

Arrived at the little glade of holly bushes, Gwynett found the chevalier and Macdonald as he had left them. No one had come within hearing, and the cavalier on the black mare had evidently passed through the forest in some other direction. Gwynett announced the success of his negotiation at Grandpré, and indicated the road thither, remarking finally,

“Monseigneur, I need not urge upon you to be circumspect in allowing anyone, other than madame Martigny and her daughter, to see you during the time you remain at the farm. It is impossible to be secure against accidental recognition if you leave the house, and that might lead to most unfortunate results.”

“Without doubt, monsieur.”

“I have prepared them for finding you a complete hermit, monseigneur, so that there is no occasion to run any risk till I can come back and release you. In the event of any unforeseen accident preventing my return, or even unduly delaying it, M. Macdonald had better go to Nonancourt in the first instance, or if necessary to M. de Torcy, to find out what is wrong.”

“I thank you very much for the trouble you have taken, monsieur. Certainly, I will adopt the precautions you recommend.”

“May I ask, monseigneur, if you have a change of clothes with you?”

“Yes. Do you suggest I should drop this disguise of mine?”

“I think it has served its purpose, monseigneur, and might now do more harm than good—especially if colonel Douglas got to know of it.”

“Very well. I will put on something else at once.”

“I wish you good evening, monseigneur.” And Gwynett rode away.

The chaise was drawn out of the little glade into the

pathway, and the chevalier, after changing his dress, drove off with Macdonald in the direction of Grandpré.

Gwynett went back to the spot where Lambert had been left with the body of Berthon, and found that worthy lying where he had been placed, and half dead with cold. It was nearly ten o'clock, and most of the lights in Louvilliers seemed to be extinguished. But Gwynett decided to try and make use of the tavern he had passed in the little village before arriving at the "Cerf Doré." He therefore untied the rope which bound Lambert's ankles together, set him on his feet by the horse, and fastened his wrist to the off-stirrup. He then placed the body of Berthon across the saddle, and secured it as well as he was able by means of the curb-rein. Lambert's head was of course still muffled in his coat, as Gwynett did not wish to give any opportunity for his own dress or his horse being recognized by the prisoner.

"Now, M. le brigand," he said, when these preparations were finished, "be good enough to walk forward alongside the horse. If you make any ridiculous attempt to escape you are a dead man."

Lambert muttered some unintelligible words in his headgear, and slouched along after the horse, while Gwynett, bridle in one hand and pistol in the other, kept him company. Ten minutes' walking brought them to the village inn, and it happened that the landlord had not yet gone to bed. At a summons from Gwynett he came to the door, and stared with a good deal of surprise at the group in the roadway.

"Monsieur," explained Gwynett, "a friend and myself, travelling from Dreux, have been attacked by these two brigands on the highway near here. One of them has been killed, and the other is here a prisoner. I want to ask you to take charge of him until to-morrow, when he shall be handed over to M. le prévôt. Of course, you shall be paid liberally for your trouble."

Gwynett accompanied these words by the display of a handful of louis d'or, and the landlord, impressed by this proof of solvency, agreed to do what was needed to further the ends of justice. Accordingly, Lambert was led to the stables in the yard, where he could be under lock and key, and the body of Berthon was placed in an adjoin-

ing shed. When this was done, Gwynett took the landlord aside, and remarked,

"These fellows had an accomplice, monsieur, who probably knows nothing of what has befallen his comrades. It is therefore extremely important that this man should not be able to send any letter or message to anyone, by way of warning. Can you manage to prevent people holding any communication with him till he is in custody?"

"I will take care of that, monsieur."

"Very good. Then here is a half-louis for your expenses, and another for your discreet assistance to justice."

The host pocketed the coins with effusive gratitude, and asked if there were any further instructions.

"Secure his feet again," replied Gwynett, "and as soon as I have gone, take the coat off his head and throw it over him as he lies on the straw. I only tied it over him for my own convenience. Would you prefer the prévôt's people to come here, or to receive him from you somewhere else?"

"Let them come here, by all means, monsieur. May one ask monsieur's name, in case the authorities should ask questions before monsieur informs them?"

"Say M. Macdonald, monsieur, of Nancy. Who is the prévôt of these parts?"

The landlord mentioned an official's name, and added,

"But M. le grand prévôt de la Haute Normandie is the chief magistrate, monsieur, and he lives nearer than M. le prévôt. It is M. le baron de Baugé, at the château."

"That will do as well or better," replied Gwynett. "No doubt you will be relieved of your charge in the morning. Good night, monsieur."

Gwynett made his way back to the "Cerf Doré" as fast as his horse would take him, and found the landlady beginning to be curious about his prolonged absence. After repeating his previous story of having been attacked by foot-pads on the road to Louvilliers, he inquired about the lad Hoël, and was told that he had not returned. He therefore rode out on the highway to St. André for a mile or so, till he reached the hill-top spoken of by Hoël

Here he stopped, and whistled two or three times. The signal received prompt response in the person of the lad himself, who emerged from a clump of trees just ahead, and came forward to meet Gwynett.

"You can go back, my lad," said the latter. "The person I was expecting will not come this way."

Hoël seemed rather pleased to be relieved of his cold vigil, and walked alongside Gwynett's horse as they returned to the "Cerf Doré." Gwynett took the opportunity of seeking a little local information, and asked as to the whereabouts of M. le grand prévôt.

"Monsieur," replied Hoël, "the château de Boissy is not far from here, at the edge of the forest."

"Toward Grandpré?"

"No, monsieur—quite the other side."

"Is M. le baron usually at home?"

"Yes, monsieur. He has the gout, and cannot get away from home very often. They say he is very bad tempered, and has furious quarrels with M. le chevalier de Baugé—that is why M. le chevalier is at home as little as he can help. But he is there just now. I saw him on his black mare this morning."

"A black mare, eh?" repeated Gwynett. "What is the chevalier like?"

Hoël gave a description which corresponded so closely with that of the horseman who had directed Gwynett to Grandpré, that the latter had no doubt of his identity.

"That accounts for his black looks," he reflected. "Evidently mademoiselle Thekla is flying at high game. But whether madame Martigny knows anything about it is another matter. It is clear the old lady is somewhat of a precisian."

The next day he rode over to the château de Boissy and requested an interview with the baron de Baugé. After some little delay, he was ushered into the presence of an elderly gentleman, who was sitting in an arm-chair with his foot bandaged and laid up on a stool, and whose expression of face rather bore out Hoël's description of his temper and his family differences. He bowed as Gwynett entered, and apologized for his inability to rise.

"Well, M. de Starhemberg," he proceeded rather sourly, "what is your business with me?"

"M. le baron, I am in this neighborhood on an affair connected with the department of M. d'Argenson, lieutenant-general of police, and have to request your co-operation in the name of monseigneur le régent himself."

"Probably you have some credentials, monsieur," remarked the baron.

Gwynett bowed, and handed to him the regent's letter, at the sight of which the baron's expression changed a good deal.

"You have somewhat extensive powers, monsieur," he said, in a tone of considerable surprise, and with more courtesy, as he handed back the letter. "What can I do for you?"

"M. le baron, we have an affair in hand of some delicacy. There appears to be a system of highway robbery, organized by persons of good standing, who are in a position to learn the intended movements of wealthy travellers. You can therefore understand that extreme discretion is necessary. We shall have to make certain arrests, and ask no questions—at all events at this stage—lest we should get altogether too compromising answers."

"That is quite intelligible. But have you had any actual cases?"

"Yes. Curiously enough, I myself was the subject of an attempt last night, probably by mistake for someone else."

"In this neighborhood?"

"Near Louvilliers. A companion of mine, however, disposed of one of the brigands by a blow from his musket, and I captured the other. I have come to ask for his formal arrest and imprisonment until the matter can be gone into. But as things have turned out, I prefer to do so unofficially. You will be good enough to consider me a mere private individual, reporting to you an open crime upon the highroad, and seeking the aid of justice in the ordinary way. In fact, I will take upon myself to make my complaints to you in the name of my companion, M. Macdonald, instead of my own."

"Certainly, monsieur, if you prefer."

"Then we have rather special reasons for suspecting a third man, and I have to ask you to assist in arresting him as soon as he can be lighted on. It is one colonel Douglas, who is attached to the British embassy."

"Rather awkward, that?"

"Yes. But as I myself saw him arrive at the 'Cerf Doré' at Nonancourt, in close company with the two men who afterwards attacked my companion and myself, there is ample excuse for an arrest, whatever explanation might be forthcoming afterwards. The authority I have shown you will relieve you of any ultimate responsibility in the matter."

"That is all that is required. But suppose this man pleads privilege?"

"He must not be listened to, and he must be put out of sight with as little fuss as possible. We can apologize afterwards, if appearances turn out to be deceptive."

"Very well, monsieur. You can have as many of my exempts as you require. Where shall they be placed at your disposal?"

"I think you had better give me three, M. le baron—one of them can bear the warrant, so that I need not appear personally. They should meet me at Verneuil, where the colonel was last heard of."

"Very good, monsieur. You may expect them at noon."

"In disguise, M. le baron, by preference—say as travelling wool-merchants. Let them ask at the post-house for 'M. de Pless.'"

"Anything else, monsieur?"

"Nothing, M. le baron, I thank you. I shall do myself the pleasure of reporting your courteous reception to monseigneur le régent."

"I shall be honored. May my housekeeper offer you any hospitality? I cannot offer you my company, unfortunately, as this infernal foot of mine is getting intolerable."

Gwynett hastened to waive any further claim on the baron's leisure or politeness, and took his leave forthwith.

From the château de Baugé he rode leisurely to Verneuil, and found that a person answering to the description of Douglas had been staying at the post-house there, but was at the moment absent. He had, however, ordered his dinner to be prepared for him, and was therefore expected back during the afternoon.

Gwynett ordered a bottle of wine, and sat in the public room till the three exempts made their appearance, which they did about half an hour afterwards. The leader of the

party presented a letter to Gwynett from the baron de Baugé. It ran:

"MONSIEUR,

"The man Lambert is in custody. On searching him and the body of his companion, both were found to be provided with passports, purporting to be signed by milord Stair. This circumstance, which may be important to you, will, of course, be kept secret. DE BAUGÉ."

"The deuce!" thought Gwynett, "that puts the fat in the fire, with a vengeance. If Douglas has gone to seek news of his two henchmen, and hears any, he will know that the passports must have been found, and he will vanish. All the better for the chevalier, perhaps."

The afternoon passed away without any appearance of the colonel, and this gave Gwynett the impression that his conjecture had already proved correct. He, therefore, fully instructed the exempts as to their programme, and went back to Nonancourt. Here no one appeared to have seen Douglas, and he rode on to Louvilliers. Nothing had occurred there of the least importance, and the removal of Lambert and the body of Berthon had not been the subject of inquiry by any stranger. Gwynett was rather puzzled, and returned to sup and sleep at the "Cerf Doré."

In the early morning he rode off to Verneuil, and found things as he had left them. The exempts had passed for wool-merchants, and kept up the character by making inquiries about the supply and price of wool in the neighborhood. Nothing had been seen or heard of Douglas.

Gwynett then went on some miles in the direction of Alençon. Near Mortagne he heard that a gentleman was laid up at the post-house there, with a severe feverish attack caught by sleeping in damp sheets. On inquiry, he found that the invalid was most likely the colonel, and that therefore he probably knew nothing of the fate of his subordinates. It was stated that the gentleman expected to be well enough to leave his bed the next morning, and intended in that case to go to Verneuil and beyond.

This seemed to Gwynett to settle the identity of the unknown, and he despatched a messenger to summon the exempts from Verneuil. The party kept watch and guard

over the post-house until the morning, and as soon as the invalid was announced to be stirring, he was quietly arrested in his room by the chief exempt.

The prisoner proved to be Douglas, and amongst his papers was found a passport, signed by lord Stair. This was taken possession of by Gwynett. After some little delay, a closed carriage was procured and the colonel taken away in it.

It was dusk before Gwynett had covered the thirteen or fourteen leagues between Mortagne and Nonancourt. He therefore postponed any visit to the chevalier until the morrow, and occupied his evening with drawing up a brief report of his proceedings so far, for transmission to the regent.

CHAPTER XX.

M. LE CAPITAINE ROUSSEAU.

IN the morning Gwynett despatched his letter to the regent by the post, and set out to report matters to the chevalier de St. George at Grandpré. He arrived at the farm about ten o'clock and was told by Thekla that the younger of the supposed brothers Macdonald was still in bed and presumably asleep, but that the elder was in the stable yard. Gwynett accordingly walked round there with his horse, and found Macdonald engaged in oiling and testing a massive old lock and key which secured the door of one of the coach-houses. Inside this coach-house was the chaise in which the chevalier and Macdonald had travelled from Chaillot.

The two gentlemen exchanged greetings, and Gwynett, pointing to the key in the other's hand, remarked,

"You seem to have some little doubt about the honesty of folks in these parts, M. Macdonald."

Macdonald looked out of the corner of his eye at Gwynett, and then replied phlegmatically,

"This chaise happens to be borrowed, M. de Starhemberg, and one ought to take all reasonable precautions with other people's property."

"I do not think M. de Torcy would expect or desire any precautions which might have the effect of exciting suspicion," said Gwynett carelessly.

"Ah!" ejaculated Macdonald, in an enlightened tone. "Well, M. de Starhemberg, as you know that much, you may perhaps as well know a little more. It is not only the chaise we have to take care of."

Gwynett glanced at the chaise, and the shape of the seat, and then observed,

"I do not think you need take any more trouble at Grandpré either about the chaise or what it carries, monsieur. I have come to say that all our three opponents are

disposed of, and to release the chevalier from his detention. The sooner he resumes his journey the better."

"I will see if he is awake," replied Macdonald, as he washed his hands in a bucket of water at the pump. "We were playing cards till the small hours this morning. Let us go indoors."

Macdonald went into the house and upstairs, while Gwynett paid his respects to madame Martigny. Presently Macdonald came down again, and invited Gwynett to the chevalier's room.

"My brother finds himself a little indisposed," he remarked, obviously for the benefit of madame Martigny, "or he would not put you to the trouble."

Gwynett went up to a large room over the kitchen, and found the chevalier sitting up in bed. Macdonald closed the door, and remarked,

"You need not be afraid of being overheard, M. de Starhemberg. I have tested all that."

"Good day, monsieur," said the chevalier. "Excuse my want of ceremony, but I am far from well."

Gwynett bowed, and looked attentively at the chevalier. But as he failed to observe any particular indications of illness, he replied,

"I regret to hear it, monseigneur. But I hope it will not prevent you being able to resume your journey. M. Macdonald will have already told you that the coast is clear, and that, so far, no suspicion seems to have been aroused."

"I am immensely indebted for your good offices, monsieur, and think you have managed admirably. Of course, I must go on to St. Malo as soon as possible. But at the moment, I assure you, I feel quite unable to travel."

"If your highness would like medical advice, I will endeavor to obtain it."

"Heavens! no—these country leeches would keep me on my back a month."

"By to-morrow, monseigneur, I could bring someone from Paris or Versailles—M. Maréchal, for example?"

"That would start everybody gossiping. No, no, my dear M. de Starhemberg. It will only be for a day or two. Probably it is not convenient for you to remain longer in the neighborhood, and if so, do not let me tax your good-nature any further."

"Monseigneur, I hold myself responsible to monseigneur le régent for your safe departure from France, so that I am entirely at your disposal."

The chevalier did not look particularly grateful for this assurance.

"Perhaps, then, monsieur," he said, "it will put you to the least trouble if I ask you to be good enough to await news from me at Nonancourt."

"Certainly, monseigneur. I will make a point of calling upon you to-morrow morning."

"By no means, monsieur," said the chevalier hastily. "I could not think of troubling you. The moment I feel again able to travel, I will send Macdonald to let you know. Is there anything else you have to tell me?"

"Nothing, monseigneur," replied Gwynett, accepting his dismissal. "My best wishes for your speedy convalescence."

Macdonald escorted Gwynett downstairs and to the porch.

"This indisposition comes a little inconveniently, monsieur," he remarked apologetically, after glancing round to see that they were alone.

"What is the matter with the chevalier?" asked Gwynett abruptly, and looking rather hard at his companion.

Macdonald shrugged his shoulders, and gazed with an expressionless face at the distant landscape as he replied,

"The chevalier takes fancies occasionally. I do my best to combat them, for many reasons. I hope I may be successful in the present instance."

"There is urgent need for haste," remarked Gwynett. "It is very unlikely that the chevalier's departure from Lorraine can escape publicity for more than a few days. The moment it is publicly known, the regent will be driven to take action, and have all the roads and sea-ports watched."

"I will fully impress all you say upon the chevalier. I shall hope to bring word to you very shortly."

"The sooner the better," replied Gwynett, walking off to the stable yard for his horse.

Just after he had mounted, Thekla made her appearance from the dairy, and offered to open and shut the gate leading from the yard to the road. Gwynett expressed a hope

that the visitor's temporary ailment would not put madame Martigny or herself to any inconvenience.

"What is the matter, then, monsieur?" asked the girl, evidently a little surprised.

"I did not learn," replied Gwynett. "Probably nothing of any consequence, or you would have heard before this."

At this moment a horseman, riding along the road, came into view. He was an elderly, red-faced man, in a military dress, and with somewhat the air of an old campaigner. He raised his hat to Thekla with a smile which was half a leer, looked rather significantly at Gwynett, and proceeded on his way without stopping. Gwynett noticed that Thekla turned rather red at the *rencontre*, and looked down upon the ground as she closed the gate after him.

"That is M. le capitaine Rousseau," she explained hastily. "A friend of M. le chevalier de Baugé, at the château. He lodged here once."

She dropped a curtsy and ran back to the house, while Gwynett proceeded on his way to Nonancourt.

"Is it since then that madame Martigny has ceased to take lodgers, I wonder?" he thought to himself. "If so, it is certain the old lady has some penetration."

Arrived at the "Cerf Doré" Gwynett sent off a further report to the regent, and set himself, in no particularly good humor, to fill up his leisure while awaiting the expected summons from the chevalier. Having learned that some fishing could be had by applying for permission to the baron de Baugé, he sent off Hoël with a note requesting the privilege. This was promptly conceded, and he spent the rest of the day endeavoring, with more or less success, to fill his basket with certain mediæval carp from a pond near the hamlet of St. Remy.

Neither the next day nor the morning after brought any message from the chevalier, and Gwynett began to be considerably dissatisfied about matters. He therefore decided to disregard the chevalier's hint, and to pay a visit of inquiry at Grandpré without waiting for an invitation.

After breakfast he mounted his horse and rode off to the farm. On arriving there he found no one in the house except madame Martigny, who told him that her elder guest had gone to Louvilliers to have one of the grey horses shod, and that the younger had left the house an hour before

with the expressed intention of taking a little exercise in the fresh air.

"In which direction, madame?" asked Gwynett.

"By the footpath between here and the forest, monsieur," replied madame Martigny, pointing to a track up the hillside.

Gwynett put his horse in the stable and went off to seek the chevalier in the direction indicated. The path led into some thick coppice-wood, and then divided to the right and left up the slope of the hill. He followed the former for some time without seeing or hearing anything of the chevalier, and then turned back.

Here and there the coppice had little glades which opened out into the fields. In returning, Gwynett followed one of these glades in order to look out over the open country. As soon as he was clear of the trees he surveyed the hill slope, and thought he saw a man's figure half a mile below him, passing behind a hedge towards the farm. It was apparently in black velvet clothes, and might therefore be the chevalier. As there was no nearer route back than by the path he had just left, Gwynett returned to it, and presently found himself at the point where the two tracks united.

As he reached it the girl Thekla appeared, approaching him by the other pathway, and curtsied in response to his salute.

"Good morning, mademoiselle," said Gwynett. "I have been looking for the younger M. Macdonald. Have you seen anything of him?"

Thekla looked away in the direction of the farm, and replied with some little confusion,

"I think monsieur's friend was down in one of the pastures a little while ago, near the house. I have been seeking one of our cows, which has strayed; but it is not this way, so I am going on farther down the hill."

As this seemed to suggest that the chevalier was probably now at the farm, Gwynett turned to accompany Thekla homewards, and they walked on a little distance together.

Before, however, they were clear of the coppice, footsteps were heard behind and a man overtook them. As he went by, Gwynett recognized the captain Rousseau, who

had ridden past the gate of Grandpré on the occasion of his last visit. The captain saluted Thekla with great *empressement*, and looked inquiringly at Gwynett.

"I trust mademoiselle, and also madame her mother, are quite well," he remarked. "Will mademoiselle do me the favor to make me acquainted with this gentleman who honors our miserable neighborhood with his presence?"

Thekla seemed annoyed at this suggestion, and performed the required introduction rather sulkily.

"M. de Starhemberg, this is M. le capitaine Rousseau, a friend of M. le chevalier de Baugé."

The two gentlemen saluted, and the captain, looking rather hard at Gwynett, observed,

"Monsieur is probably staying at Grandpré?"

"No, monsieur. I have a room at the 'Cerf Doré' at Nonancourt."

"Indeed! A very comfortable house. If it would not be disagreeable to monsieur, I would ask permission to do myself the pleasure of calling upon him there."

Gwynett bowed, without at all reciprocating this solicitude for his society, and replied,

"My movements are uncertain, monsieur, and it unfortunately happens that I may leave the 'Cerf Doré' at any hour."

"Possibly to return to Paris?" hazarded the captain, with a persistence which began to annoy Gwynett.

"Possibly, monsieur," he replied curtly.

"Because," explained the captain blandly, "if monsieur were returning to Paris, I should be enraptured to offer him the hospitality of my hôtel. In the meantime, if I should be passing the 'Cerf Doré,' and have the good fortune to hear that monsieur is still there, perhaps he will permit me to present my compliments to him?"

"Monsieur does me too much honor," replied Gwynett, raising his hat as a hint that he wished to proceed on his way.

"On the contrary, monsieur," returned the captain, with a corresponding salute, and standing on one side to permit Gwynett and Thekla to pass on.

Mademoiselle," said Gwynett, as soon as they were out of hearing, "it appears to me that strangers have no occasion to complain of neglect in this part of the world."

"It is an old fool, whom I detest," replied Thekla angrily. "I beg monsieur to take no notice of his meddling. He gives himself all those airs because M. le chevalier de Baugé makes a boon companion of him when he has no other friends at hand."

By this time the farm was reached, and Thekla offered to see if the chevalier had returned. This proved to be the case, and Gwynett was asked to go up to his room. The chevalier was lounging on a sort of settee, and looked up with a languid air as Gwynett entered.

"Good day, monsieur," he said. "I am sorry to have given you so much trouble. I was out, trying to get a little strength from the fresh air."

"I hope you find yourself better, monseigneur."

"A little—only a little. My day and night travelling from Commercy and the abominable roads seem to have knocked me up altogether. But I am better, decidedly. In a few days, perhaps——"

"Permit me to suggest, monseigneur, that the resumption of your journey by easy stages would enable you to reach the coast without undue fatigue, and then the sea air may be relied on to give you renewed vigor."

"So they say," replied the chevalier, with a yawn. "I have not seen the sea since I was a baby in arms, so I cannot tell."

"I presume, monseigneur, you are alive to the risk of finding the coast blockaded by admiral Byng, if your escape has been made known to him?"

"I fancy Byng will not leave the mouth of the Seine as long as there is anything of ours there for him to steal. Probably you are aware, monsieur, that most of our arms and stores are deposited at Havre?"

"Monseigneur, I am afraid you really underrate the danger of delay. Lord Stair will naturally draw some conclusion from colonel Douglas's disappearance. He will take some fresh step, and whatever step he may take will be to your disadvantage."

The chevalier moved a little restlessly.

"Well, monsieur," he said, "we will see how I feel to-morrow. Nothing can be done till then, as Macdonald has had to see to one of our horses, which has cast a

shoe. The only blacksmith in these parts seems to be ill."

"If that is all, monseigneur, I can manage that myself. Shoeing is the one accomplishment on which I pride myself."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the chevalier, in a discomfited tone. "Well—to-morrow, then, monsieur."

Gwynett saw no use in persisting further, so bowed and withdrew. On inquiry below, he found that Macdonald had not returned. There was apparently nothing for it but to go back to Nonancourt and wait until the next day.

He therefore extended his ride through St. Remy and St. Germain for the purpose of seeing the neighboring country, and found his way back to the "Cerf Doré" at about three o'clock. He took his horse to the stables, and noticed a couple of mares standing saddled in the next stalls. One of them was black, and he fancied it looked like the mare ridden by M. de Baugé.

On entering the house, he ordered his dinner to be prepared, and went to his room. Presently madame l'Hôpital came up, and intimated that a gentleman wished to see him.

"Who is it, madame?"

"M. le capitaine Rousseau, monsieur."

"Is there a good fire in the dining-room, madame?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Ask M. le capitaine in there, and say I will come to him at once."

CHAPTER XXI.

A MESSAGE.

WHEN Gwynett went down to the dining-room he found his visitor sitting before the fire in a severely rigid attitude, and with a solemn expression upon his countenance. He rose and bowed with much ceremony, and then, at Gwynett's invitation, took his seat again.

"Monsieur," said he, "I have first of all to apologize for my seeming pertinacity in making myself acquainted with your name and address a little while ago at Grand-pré. The reason was, that I required the information, and thought it might be better to make use of that opportunity than to wait about and follow you afterwards—which might have looked curious."

"Monsieur is, of course, the best judge," replied Gwynett.

"Then, monsieur, you accept my assurance that no intrusion was intended on that occasion. Good, so far. Now, monsieur, I have to announce that my object was to be able to wait upon you on behalf of my friend M. le chevalier de Baugé."

Gwynett bowed, and seated himself to await further enlightenment.

"I have had the honor," he said, "of making the acquaintance of M. le baron de Baugé. But I am not quite sure whether I have seen M. le chevalier."

"Monsieur, I have to complain, on the part of M. le chevalier, that he has seen you much too often."

"Explain, M. le capitaine."

"Well, as a matter of fact, monsieur, my friend finds your constant presence at Grand-pré disagreeable to him. I am therefore commissioned to ask for an assurance of your immediate departure from this neighborhood."

Gwynett began to see how the land lay, and felt inwardly rather amused.

"Really, monsieur," he replied, "it appears to me that M. le chevalier is a little exacting. Within how many miles of Grandpré does he allow strangers to remain, as a general rule?"

"Monsieur, it is not a question of strangers. It is a question of yourself. It will be discreet of monsieur not to compel me to bring another person's name into the discussion."

"I think your discretion is needlessly profound, M. le capitaine. So long as it is a matter between us two you may surely speak freely. What is M. de Baugé's grievance, in plain words?"

"In plain words, monsieur, my friend interests himself in mademoiselle Thekla Martigny, and consequently objects to your forcing your society upon her."

Gwynett burst out laughing.

"The deuce!" he said. "Your chevalier is a modern dragon of the Hesperides. Is he as particular with everyone as with me?"

"Monsieur, I assure you the matter is serious."

"Possibly. I have no objection. But unfortunately I am compelled to be at Grandpré when occasion arises, and it is clear I cannot ask mademoiselle Thekla to go away."

"Then I am to gather you are not disposed to meet my friend's wishes."

"Not in the direction he suggests, certainly. At the same time, you may assure him from me that he need not concern himself in the slightest degree about my proceedings, and that my presence or absence has nothing to do with the matter he has in his mind."

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"I am afraid, monsieur, that that will hardly satisfy my friend."

"I am sorry; but we cannot all have our own way in this world, M. le capitaine, as I daresay you have discovered before now."

"In this case, as occasionally in others, monsieur, there is an obvious alternative."

"No doubt. M. de Baugé can let the matter drop, and he will find things in exactly the same state as if he had not interfered."

"On the contrary, monsieur, he asks you, through me,

to refer me to some friend, if you happen to have one in the neighborhood."

"I only think of one, and he may possibly not be available. To save time, I would venture to suggest, M. le capitaine, that you say what you have to say to me, and we can leave the question of my friend till later. I understand, then, that M. de Baugé insists upon a meeting?"

"Precisely, monsieur."

"That simplifies matters. What do you propose about details, M. le capitaine?"

"As to the time and place, monsieur, the earlier and nearer the better, and with regard to weapons, my friend would prefer you to make some proposal yourself."

"I esteem M. de Baugé's courtesy. What sort of a swordsman is he?"

"The best in this neighborhood, monsieur."

"And pistol-shot?"

"The best I know anywhere, monsieur."

"Those are rather favorable circumstances for your friend, M. le capitaine. I do not pretend to be much of a shot myself. But perhaps pistols would be a little more equal for both of us than swords. There is only one little difficulty that I see."

"What is that, monsieur?"

"Your friend is rich?"

"Passably so, monsieur."

"And probably unmarried?"

"That is so."

"It is understood that M. de Baugé picks the quarrel, and not I?"

"Certainly."

"Very good. I am quite willing to meet M. de Baugé, but I do so merely to oblige him. I have not the slightest ill-feeling towards him. On the other hand, M. de Baugé probably desires to do me a mischief, eh?"

The captain drew himself up rather loftily.

"Monsieur," he said, "permit me to express a fear that you may be somewhat unfamiliar with affairs of honor. Your question appears to me a little out of place."

"Well, perhaps you are right. Let us put it in another way. I do not wish to kill M. de Baugé, and if I do kill him, there is no one but himself concerned. On the other

hand, I am not so lucky as M. de Baugé, in that I have no independent means. Your friend, as you will admit, wants to kill me, and if he does kill me, what is to become of my wife and family?"

"Monsieur, it is perfectly impossible for me to go into these considerations. It would certainly be more convenient if you would place me in communication with your friend."

"Do not say that, M. le capitaine. I think there is no reason why we should not come to a perfect understanding. Allow me to make a few suggestions, and afterwards you can criticise them."

The captain bowed with rather a patronizing air, and remarked,

"Of course I am in your hands, monsieur."

"Very good. Then, M. le capitaine, I beg to propose that we fight either with sword or pistol, as M. de Baugé may prefer, on the following terms: If M. de Baugé chooses the pistol, he must on his part undertake to pay my family, if he kills me, the sum of twenty thousand livres——"

"*Diable!* but——"

"Dirt cheap, you were going to say—and I agree with you. Still, it shows my reasonableness. Well, I, for my part, will make matters as comfortable for M. de Baugé as I can by aiming straight at him. If I did anything else, you see, I might hit him by some accident. On the other hand, if M. de Baugé chooses the sword, I will meet him with a walking-stick, without suggesting any conditions whatever."

"A walking-stick!" echoed the captain, with his eyes like saucers.

"Yes, M. le capitaine," replied Gwynett, in an extremely confidential tone, "and I will tell you why. You must understand that once or twice I have been very unlucky with the sword. Usually I have been able to prevent my opponents getting themselves hurt; but when one has to do with a clumsy fellow, or a novice, one never knows what silly thing he will do before one can stop him. I recollect that my hundredth duel, curiously enough, was a case in point. Some young fool, who could no more fence than fly, in spite of all my care, absolutely jumped

on the point of my sword, and was dead in two minutes. I can generally manage not to hurt a decent swordsman, but I cannot guarantee it with a bungler. What is your experience, M. le capitaine?"

As the captain could only gaze speechlessly at Gwynett, the latter continued,

"That makes me prefer not to run any risks with your friend, who is no doubt a good sort of fellow, and whom I would not hurt for the world. As to what you say about his own swordsmanship, these provincial reputations are merely amusing. For myself, there are not three men in Europe who can touch me. If it would interest you to see me strip to the waist, I will bet you a dozen of champagne that you cannot find more than four scars as the result of perhaps a couple of hundred meetings. That speaks for itself."

"Good lord," gasped the captain, completely crushed by this amiable confidence.

"Thus you see," continued Gwynett, "that a walking-stick will serve me very well indeed, and your friend can make himself easy. A pistol is different. Any fool can kill somebody with a pistol, even with his eyes shut, and I never run risks of that sort without a decent excuse for it."

At this moment the landlady entered to ask if dinner should be served. The captain jumped up hastily.

"Do not let me interfere with your arrangements, monsieur," said he. "I will confer with my principal and wait upon you later."

"On the contrary, M. le capitaine, remain here and allow me to order a second cover to be laid. There is no hurry."

The captain, scenting a good dinner afar off, looked very much gratified.

"Monsieur is extremely obliging," he said. "I accept with pleasure."

Gwynett nodded to madame l'Hôpital, and the landlady went out.

"Allow me to ask, M. le capitaine, whether it was not M. de Bauge's black mare I saw in the yard?"

"It was, monsieur."

"Is he here?"

"Somewhere in the post-house, monsieur."

"Then do me the favor to convey to him my most respectful compliments, and ask him, pending the adjustment of our little difference, to join us at dinner. There will be plenty of time to settle matters afterwards."

The captain took up his hat.

"Monsieur, I will convey to M. de Baugé your very courteous invitation. As you say, there is no hurry."

The captain went out, and Gwynett smiled to himself.

"Let us hope," he thought, "that my little bit of bluff will serve its purpose. I am hardly justified in getting mixed up with affairs of this sort till the chevalier is off my hands. Besides, there is always the chance of some accident."

Presently there came the sound of voices outside the door, and the captain, followed by his principal, entered the room.

"I have the honor to introduce M. le chevalier de Baugé to M. de Starhemberg."

The newcomer, in whom Gwynett recognized his guide to Grandpré on the night of his first visit there, came forward and bowed with as much grace as his evident rusticity would permit of. Then he looked at Gwynett, gave a little start, and turned round to the captain.

"This is not the man," he said abruptly.

"Not the man!" echoed the captain. "Of course it is the man—that is," he added, with a bow to Gwynett, "if monsieur will pardon me."

"Monsieur," remarked de Baugé rather awkwardly, "there has been some mistake, for which I hope you will accept my apologies. It is the fault of the captain, I assure you."

"Not in the least," persisted the captain.

"Messieurs," said Gwynett, who began to suspect a serious explanation of what had occurred, "if I am the wrong person, and if there is no hurry about the right person, I presume nothing need prevent our dining together. As a matter of fact, I am very hungry."

"With great pleasure," replied de Baugé. "And, in any case, I am indebted to the mistake for the honor of monsieur's acquaintance."

At this point the dinner was served, and Gwynett, to se-

cure privacy, told the landlady that the party would wait upon themselves.

"And now, messieurs," he remarked, as soon as they were alone, "if I do not intrude upon your private affairs, I am a little curious to know how this misunderstanding has arisen. I gathered from M. le capitaine that M. le Baugé is an admirer of mademoiselle Thekla Martigny, who is certainly a wonderfully pretty girl; but that is the end of my information."

"Monsieur," explained the captain, "the matter arose quite simply out of the fact of your spending the greater part of the last three or four days in mademoiselle Thekla's company."

"I? Nothing of the sort, M. le capitaine. I have seen mademoiselle Thekla three times at Grandpré, it is true, but for less than a quarter of an hour altogether."

"But excuse me, monsieur, this very morning M. de Baugé, after watching you for an hour or more——"

Gwynett smiled, and de Baugé turned rather red.

"Monsieur will agree," he said, "that everything is fair in love and war. It is true I was at a considerable distance."

"Go on, M. le capitaine," said Gwynett.

"M. de Baugé, after watching monsieur for an hour or more, sent me after you to demand satisfaction. I overtook you, as you recollect, on your return to the farm."

"As it happens," replied Gwynett, "I had joined mademoiselle Thekla only a couple of minutes before you reached us. Probably M. de Baugé never saw me at all."

"Then her previous companion must in the meantime have left her," said de Baugé. "That accounts for it. But you will recollect, monsieur, that it was certainly you who asked me the way to Grandpré the other night."

"And," added the captain, "monsieur will admit it was he whom I saw at the gate a couple of days ago."

The identity of Thekla's companion was, of course, obvious to Gwynett, and he silently loaded the chevalier de St. George with execrations for his perverse folly.

"That is true," he replied. "I think, however, that I am acquainted with the other person whom M. de Baugé has seen, and if so, he need trouble himself no further, as we are both leaving the district within a few hours."

"I accept monsieur's assurance," replied de Baugé, "and wish him a pleasant journey."

The meal passed off without further incident, and the three gentlemen were sitting over their wine when a letter was handed to Gwynett which had been brought by a special courier from Paris. With an apology to his guests, he went off to his room to open the packet. It was from the regent, and ran:

"DEAR CHEVALIER,

"For their own safety it is imperative that the messieurs Macdonald should continue their journey, as at any moment I may be compelled to arrest them. It has been necessary, on the receipt of reports from admiral Byng, to order the disembarkation of the stores on certain ships at Havre. Two of the English frigates have since sailed from Havre towards the west, possibly to cruise off St. Malo.

PHILIPPE."

"This will serve very conveniently," thought Gwynett, as he put the letter in his pocket. "If not, I shall be very much disposed to arrest the chevalier myself, and smuggle him out of the country on my own account."

He packed his valise, and went down to the stables to have his horse saddled. Then he ordered a fresh dozen of wine to be sent into the dining-room, settled his account with the landlady, and returned to his two guests. Both had employed the time of his absence in liberal potations, and hailed with vinous enthusiasm his request that they would accept the basket of wine just brought in and excuse his further attendance. This arrangement being satisfactorily come to, Gwynett took his departure from the "Cerf Doré" and rode off to Grandpré.

It was dusk when he arrived at the farm. Leading his horse round to the yard he met Macdonald, and took him aside.

"M. Macdonald," he said, "permit me to remark that you and M. le chevalier have been bamboozling me. May I ask why?"

Macdonald shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear M. de Starhemberg," he replied drily, "if you imagine it is an easy matter to get M. le chevalier to do what you and I might call sensible things, you labor under a delusion. Personally, I agree with you in anything you care to say—or to leave unsaid."

"It appears, then, that he has been wasting the last three days philandering after this girl, when every moment is of consequence?"

"Yes. I have done what I could; but uselessly. If you knew the chevalier better, you would quite understand that. Do you propose anything yourself?"

"I have come to get him away to-night—by the express instructions of the regent."

"That may count for something. I hope it will. The chevalier is indoors; let us see what can be done with him."

The two went into the house, and found the chevalier in earnest conversation with Thekla in the great kitchen of the farm. Madame Martigny was apparently engaged elsewhere. Gwynett asked for a private interview, and the chevalier took him up to his room.

"Well, M. de Starhemberg," he said gaily, and with no trace of his former languid air, "what is your news?"

"Monseigneur, I have just received this letter from Paris," replied Gwynett, handing over the regent's despatch.

The chevalier perused it, and nodded affirmatively.

"I think M. d'Orléans is quite right," he said.

"Then you are disposed to adopt his suggestion, monseigneur, and resume your journey?"

"Certainly. The sooner the better."

"I think, monseigneur, it will be a great point to travel both by night and day. You can use post-horses, and send your pair of greys back after the first stage."

"That is true."

"For myself, I suggest that I should keep in advance, and take care that the relays are ready for you when you come to each post-house. That will also enable me to see if the road is clear through to St. Malo."

"A very good plan. We can have a meal, and start as soon as it is dark."

"Then, monseigneur, with your permission, I will ask M. Macdonald to get ready."

"If you will be so good, monsieur."

Gwynett went downstairs, wondering why on earth Macdonald should have failed in persuading the chevalier to take this step earlier.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH GWYNETT MEETS TWO OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

ON the third evening after Gwynett's final visit to Grandpré, he arrived on horseback at the town of Havre, rode to the shore, and inquired if anything was known in the port of an English vessel called the *Royal Mary*. He was told that a certain schooner lying in the Seine was the craft in question, and that he would probably find her captain at the sailors' tavern near the eastern jetty.

He accordingly went to the house indicated, called the "Dragon Rouge," and asked at the bar for the captain of the *Royal Mary*. Learning that he was in the parlor, Gwynett made his way thither, and found the room in the solitary occupancy of a short and enormously stout seafaring man, who was sitting in a low chair before the fire, with a long pipe in his mouth and a glass of Schnapps on the table beside him. This person turned his head as Gwynett entered, and revealed the rubicund visage of captain Christopher Kermode.

"Why, captain! is it you?" asked Gwynett, in considerable surprise, and going up with outstretched hand.

The captain looked equally astonished.

"The squire! well, I'm blowed!" he ejaculated, pulling his forelock and grasping Gwynett's hand with gingerly respect. "And how is your honor's good health?"

"Never better, captain, I thank you. I need not ask after yours. But I daresay you have forgotten my name. It is Starhemberg. Can you manage to recollect that?"

The captain laid his finger against the side of his nose with a sagacious air.

"A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse," he replied. "Starhemberg. I'll remember—and I'll tell the others. Least said, soonest mended. Did your honor ever hear any more of the missing gentleman?"



"Nothing. Nor you, I suppose?"

"Never a word. The *Mermaid* hasn't come back yet—leastways, not when I was last in an English port."

"Well, captain, to business. You are skipper of the *Royal Mary*, it appears?"

"Yes, squire."

"How is it that you are not at St. Malo, as arranged?"

The captain looked sideways at Gwynett.

"St. Malo, was it?" he inquired cautiously.

"Of course. You may speak freely, for——" and Gwynett leaned over to whisper in the captain's ear.

"Oh! then, that's all right," said the captain, in a relieved tone. "Well, if you must know, I've papers for the schooner, but none for the cargo. We have powder and lead and biscuit aboard for the prince. You see, I was to have taken the *Royal Mary* round to St. Malo a fortnight back, to wait there for orders."

"That was what I understood."

"Yes, squire. But between whiles we've had the admiral smelling about. Two of the prince's ships have been overhauled by the governor and the stores taken ashore—orders from Paris. The admiral set him at it. He's cruising off the port now with a couple of frigates, and I daren't move. So far, they haven't suspected the *Royal Mary*, but the prince's people went away without thinking I might want cargo papers. If I sail, and get a shot across my bows for me to heave to while the admiral sends a boatful of his folks on board, where am I? Can you tell me where the prince is, squire, if I may make so bold?"

"Waiting at St. Malo. We arrived yesterday. But not finding the *Royal Mary* at the port, as we expected, it was decided that I should ride over here and see what was wrong."

"That's what's wrong, squire. A month ago there was nobody to ask questions. But admiral Byng is as keen as a terrier after rats."

"I will see about papers for you. When can you sail?"

"As soon as your honor chooses. I can wait here for the papers. Will your honor sail with us?"

"No. You might be delayed by a change of wind, and I am wanted back at St. Malo."

Gwynett went off to seek an interview with the gov-

ernor of the port, to whom he showed his credentials and made his request that the *Royal Mary* should be duly certificated in a way to prevent any difficulty with the English cruisers. The governor hastened to give every assistance, and French papers from Havre to Dunkerque were made out for the schooner, to cover both ship and cargo. It appeared that the *Royal Mary* was already provisioned and could replenish her water supply in an hour. Captain Kermode therefore undertook to sail with the ebb-tide. These arrangements made, Gwynett, who had been nearly twenty-four hours in the saddle on his cross-country ride from St. Malo, went to bed to sleep off his fatigue.

He set off on his return journey rather late the next morning, slept at Falaise, and arrived at St. Malo in the afternoon of the following day.

The inn at which the chevalier and Macdonald had taken rooms was near the shore of the islet called Rocher d'Aaron, on which St. Malo stands, and was the rendezvous of half a dozen adherents of the royal exile, including his confessor father Innis, M. d'Iberville, and captain Floyd. While Gwynett, having put up his horse, was making his way to the inn through the narrow streets of old six-story houses, Macdonald entered the bedroom of the chevalier. The latter had just awoke, and was asking for his breakfast.

Macdonald waited until the servant had left the room, and then whispered,

"We have managed about the money without any difficulty, your majesty."

"Who helped you?" asked the chevalier.

"I took no one but father Innis. The gold is now in the four leather bags. Each weighs about a hundred-weight, but that is manageable; the chest was not. Luckily, the louis are all packed in rouleaux, so that they make no noise. I filled the chest with stones, in case of accidents."

"Will the abbé Gaultier know?"

"Certainly not—unless he goes to explore the chest. But the chest and seat-box and coach-house are all locked. I see no reason for making him any wiser till we are quite out of reach of the cruisers—it is possible for even safe people to talk in their sleep."

"The abbé has not returned yet?"

"No. And I should not lament if he never returned at all."

"Pooh! my dear Macdonald, I want my breakfast, and not a sermon."

"In any case, I advise your majesty to keep M. de Starhemberg in the dark about the affair."

"What the plague has he to do with it?"

Macdonald shrugged his shoulders, and left the room with no particular exhibition of ceremony. On the stairs he met Gwynett.

"Ah! M. de Starhemberg! You have not let the grass grow under your feet. Do you wish to see the chevalier?"

"If he is at liberty."

"Come in, M. de Starhemberg," called out the chevalier, who had overhead the colloquy. "What is your news?"

Gwynett narrated the circumstances of his mission, and asked if the *Royal Mary* had yet been reported at St. Malo.

"Not so far, monsieur," replied Macdonald.

"She has had a fair wind, and cannot be far off. I will inquire about her, if your highness has no other commands for me."

At this moment a note was brought up for Macdonald, which he read out. It was from father Innis, saying that the brig had just cast anchor in the harbor, and sent a boat ashore to report its arrival.

"That settles matters," said Gwynett. "I presume your highness is quite ready to start? If admiral Byng's two vessels are not off the port already, they may come at any moment."

"But he would not venture to search a ship carrying the papers you secured for captain Kermode?" asked the chevalier.

"No. But if he hears or finds anything suspicious, through any spy or otherwise, he will keep the schooner in sight to see what becomes of her. And I would not undertake to say what he would do if the *Royal Mary* entered British waters in his company."

The chevalier shuffled his feet about rather impatiently.

"We are waiting for one of our suite," he replied, in a

tone obviously intended to terminate the interview. "As soon as he arrives, our party will be complete, and there will be nothing to prevent our setting sail at once."

"Very good, monseigneur. I will await your summons, and then do myself the honor of seeing you safe on board."

Gwynett bowed and retired. Macdonald followed him, and took him aside.

"M. de Starhemberg," he said, with a keen look, "you wish well to the chevalier?"

"Is that in doubt, M. Macdonald?"

"Well, no. But may I speak to you in strict confidence?"

"Assuredly."

"Then the best service you can render the chevalier is to invent an approach of admiral Byng, and get his highness off at once, without waiting for anybody."

"Ah?"

Macdonald nodded, shook hands, and returned to the chevalier's room.

Gwynett went downstairs, rather wondering if the suggestion just made was to be taken seriously. On the landing, which was very dark and narrow, he was passed by a man coming upstairs, whose features were indistinguishable in the gloom. But the newcomer's voice, as he apologized for squeezing past Gwynett struck the latter with some faint echo of familiarity. He was trying to associate the tones with some definite memory, when, on emerging from the doorway into the street, he stepped almost into the arms of a passer-by. This person was an elderly gentleman, dressed severely in black, with large gold spectacles, and the air of a medical man. Gwynett uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Doctor Vidal, if I mistake not," he said, holding out his hand.

"At monsieur's service," replied the other, looking up. "But have I the honor——? Ah! certainly monsieur's face is familiar to me. But——"

"M. le docteur, permit me to recall to your memory that I was a patient of yours for a few days at Calais, three or four years ago, at the house of M. le gouverneur."

"*Parbleu!* I recollect. And you slept enormously——"

was it not so? We took you off a ship newly arrived—the *Fleur de Lys*. Yes. But I am ashamed to say your name escapes me.”

“Starhemberg, M. le docteur.”

“Starhemberg? I had absolutely forgotten it. But I will recollect it for the future.”

“And are you still living at Calais, monsieur?”

“No. I have been at St. Malo a twelvemonth; my family belong to the place, and I have recently inherited a small patrimony here. I am just going for a turn on the road to Alençon; may I ask the favor of your company?”

“With great pleasure.”

The two turned their steps in the direction of Le Sillon (the causeway connecting Rocher d’Aaron with the mainland), and the doctor continued,

“Since I saw you, monsieur, I have had an interesting subject of study in hand, which was partly the cause of my leaving Calais.”

“What is that, monsieur?”

“Well, as you know, Calais is a sea-port, and therefore we often had drowning fatalities there. I made several autopsies of such cases in the course of my practice, and was struck by the fact that I seldom, if ever, found much water in the lungs. That is contrary to all belief and tradition, you observe. Nevertheless, the fact remains.”

“But,” objected Gwynett, who shared the usual ignorance of the period on the subject, “I thought everyone swallowed water in getting drowned.”

“Swallow?” echoed the doctor, with professional scorn. “My good sir, I am talking of the lungs, not the stomach. You may swallow a caskful, in the water or out of it—what does that matter?”

“True. I should perhaps have said breathed water, instead of air.”

“Ah!” cried the doctor, “that is the point. If one breathes water in drowning, it ought to be found in the lungs, and it is not—at least, not in any quantity.”

“I do not quite understand that.”

“Nor did I. And I ask myself, why not? And if not, why does drowning kill? And it occurred to me that what actually happens is this. When the water which is sucked into the mouth touches the glottis—inside there, you

know——” and the doctor touched his companion’s windpipe.

“Well?”

“When the water, in the course of being sucked towards the windpipe, touches the glottis, it causes it to close spasmodically, so that nothing can enter—neither water, nor air, nor anything else. Then you suffocate.”

“That is very interesting, M. le docteur. But it seems to me one gets drowned all the same.”

“Don’t be in a hurry. Take your drowned man out of the water, say a few minutes after he sinks. If his lungs are filled with water, one cannot remove it, and therefore one cannot expect him to begin breathing again; but if his lungs are free, there is nothing the matter with him.”

“Only that he is dead.”

“How can a man be dead when there is nothing the matter with him? Why does he not begin to breathe again?”

“I suppose he has lost the habit.”

“*Rem acu tetigisti*. That is it, my young friend. What next?”

“Next?”

The doctor snapped his fingers triumphantly as they walked along.

“My dear M. de Starhemberg, listen! One day at Calais, as I was on the beach thinking over these things, a young fellow was drowned under my very eyes. They took him out five minutes afterwards. I followed the body to the house, sent for my assistant and a small bellows, and got the corpse stripped and put on to a bed. Then I shut the door on the widow and family, and set to work with my assistant.”

“How, may I ask?”

“Why, seeing that the man had, as you say, lost the habit of breathing, we taught him to resume the habit. We blew up his lungs fifteen or twenty times a minute, and pressed his chest after each inflation. It seems to take time to resume an abandoned habit, and we worked for an hour uselessly. Then the corpse opened its eyes. We had done the trick.”

“The man actually came to life again?”

“That was it.”

"Wonderful! Have they put up your statue at Calais?"

"Well, not exactly. It appeared that while we were upstairs, the widow had made arrangements to marry someone else, an intimate friend of the deceased. Naturally, when the corpse walked downstairs, he found himself a good deal *de trop*. The wife and her new *fiancé* at once spread abroad the explanation that I was a magician in league with the devil. My assistant wanted to get hold of my practice, and gave a sulphurous account of my method, which, according to him, was chiefly a series of incantations. The resuscitated husband did nothing but curse me for disturbing his belief in his wife's fidelity, and drank himself to death in a month. I did not care to interfere on the occasion of his second decease, as you may imagine. In fact, the whole affair got me into such bad odor that I was glad to leave the place and come here. Thus I have the good fortune to meet you to-day."

"It is very remarkable. According to what you say, one could almost be drowned on dry land."

"My dear sir," cried Vidal, with enthusiasm, "I'll engage to drown you in your bed, any time you like, and resuscitate you afterwards. It is as simple as possible. But here is someone who seems to know you."

The doctor and Gwynett had by this time just crossed Le Sillon. A man in riding costume was walking rapidly towards the causeway, and advanced to meet them. It was M. de Baugé, looking very red and angry. He came straight up to Gwynett and saluted.

"Monsieur," he said, "are your two friends in the town yonder?"

"The messieurs Macdonald?"

"Yes—if it was they who were at Grandpré. I have a question to put to them, and if not to them, to you. I have ridden from Grandpré to ask it, and I have left my horse dead a quarter of a mile behind me. So you will see, monsieur, I expect to be answered."

"What is your question, monsieur?"

"I wish to know what you or your friends have done with mademoiselle Thekla Martigny?"

"With mademoiselle Thekla Martigny?"

"Yes, monsieur—whom I have traced to within a mile of this place, and who is now, I presume, in St. Malo. I shall be glad to have your answer, monsieur."

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW THE ABBÉ GAULTIER WAS VERY MUCH DISSATISFIED.

M. DE BAUGE'S news enlightened Gwynett upon several points.

"Now I understand," he said to himself, "why the chevalier was quite ready to leave Grandpré. Evidently he had just made an arrangement with mademoiselle Thekla for her to follow him here. Also, probably, it is for her arrival that we are all waiting. And it is for this sort of fellow that two kingdoms are to be set by the ears!"

He turned to Dr. Vidal, and said,

"M. le docteur, may I ask you to excuse me, and to allow me to have some conversation with this gentleman on my way back to St. Malo?"

"Assuredly, monsieur. I am very pleased to have renewed our acquaintance. If you can call upon me before you leave, anyone will show you my house."

The doctor saluted the two gentlemen, and proceeded on his walk, while Gwynett, turning to de Bauge, said,

"Monsieur, do me the favor to accompany me to the town and explain matters. What you tell me is quite unexpected. I know nothing about it."

De Bauge accepted Gwynett's disclaimer without demur, and replied,

"In that case, monsieur, it must be one of your two friends who is at the bottom of the affair. Perhaps you can tell me whether or not they are at St. Malo?"

"As it happens, they are here. I shall be glad to hear details of what has occurred."

"Well, monsieur, the third day after you left our neighborhood——"

"In company with my friends, please observe, M. de Bauge—and leaving mademoiselle at home."

"Certainly, for I saw her the next day, and the day after.

Each day I had the idea that things were not as they had been. On the Thursday evening—you left on the Monday—I went to Grandpré again, and failed to find her. No one had seen her since middle day. She did not come home at all that evening or night, and in the morning I called upon madame Martigny, who, by the way, looks upon me rather as an enemy——”

“Perhaps naturally, M. de Baugé. She appears to have a regard for the honor of her family.”

“All the same, she does me injustice. She accused me of decoying Thekla away. I declared, on the contrary, that it was one of her two lodgers. Just then some of the farm laborers came in to say that Thekla had been seen entering a post-chaise at Tillières, between Nonancourt and Verneuil, in company with a man who was certainly neither of the messieurs Macdonald. I at once set out in pursuit, and came upon the track of the chaise at Alençon. From there, during Friday and to-day, I have followed it without stopping. But my horse broke down just before I met you, and I had to have him killed at the blacksmith’s close by. Now what does all this mean, monsieur?”

“As to mademoiselle Thekla’s companion, monsieur, I am quite in the dark. But as it seems clear that she has come to St. Malo, I think you had better leave the matter in my hands for a short time.”

“You guess where she is?”

“I guess where she may be later on.”

“And if you find her, you will confide her to me, monsieur?”

“The devil! no. Why should I?”

De Baugé turned very red.

“In order, monsieur,” he replied, “that I may take her back to her mother, who is quite heart-broken over the affair.”

“A fine way of preserving mademoiselle Thekla’s reputation, truly, for her to return in your company. Do people in these parts accept the wolf in the rôle of shepherd as easily as all that?”

“Monsieur, you are wrong. I would willingly have married Thekla.”

“Accept my apologies. But if so, why madame Martigny’s hostility?”

De Baugé looked a little disconcerted.

"Well," he replied, "I confess that my first intentions were a little different, and madame Martigny may have suspected the fact. But I assure you I had altogether changed my mind, especially after a quarrel with my father on the subject—until this infernal business, at all events. Even now, though, I would marry her if she were willing. The affair has quite upset me, I give you my word."

"Well, I will see what can be done. There is a little tavern over there—the 'Trois Matelots'—where you can wait till I send you news."

De Baugé assented very willingly to this, and Gwynett left him to make his way to M. de St. George's lodgings. Here he found that the chevalier and all his friends had gone down to the harbor.

It was now getting dusk. The wind had fallen, and one or two scattered lights from craft in the harbor glittered on the smooth swell of the inflowing tide. Gwynett found a party of the Stuart adherents at the edge of the water, stowing away baggage and parcels in two or three small boats which were to convey them to the *Royal Mary*. Macdonald was supervising the embarkation, and in two of the sailors, Gwynett recognized Luke and Mark Kermode. But the latter, evidently instructed by their half-brother the captain, only pulled their forelocks discreetly in response to Gwynett's nod. He went up to Macdonald, and drew him aside.

"Where is the chevalier, M. Macdonald?" he asked.

"He went on board by the last trip of one of these wherries, M. de Starhemberg."

"And mademoiselle Thekla with him?"

Macdonald looked sharply at Gwynett, and shrugged his shoulders.

"No," he replied. "She had been rowed on board before."

"Monsieur," said Gwynett, "do you happen to know that in asking madame Martigny for lodgings at Grandpré, I took upon myself to assure her that she would be receiving honorable people?"

Macdonald pressed his lips together.

"M. de Starhemberg," he replied, "you had better dis-

cuss that subject with the chevalier. You must surely know that when my hands are tied, my mouth is shut at the same time."

"Very good, monsieur. I will go to the chevalier at once. It may perhaps be convenient for you to know that I shall not permit this piece of rascality to be carried out, and that if any difficulty should arise, I am in a position to enforce my wishes."

"So far from having any objection, monsieur, I suggest that you should exert all your authority, whatever that may be worth."

"My authority, M. Macdonald, extends to hanging the chevalier at the yard-arm of the *Royal Mary*."

Macdonald's face lighted up.

"If that is so, monsieur," he said eagerly, "for heaven's sake bring the girl away. It is this sort of thing that damns us wherever we turn. William of Orange did not rob the chevalier's father of his crown by fooling with farm wenches on his way to Torbay."

Gwynett smiled grimly.

"M. Macdonald, it seems to me that you have the post of dry-nurse to an ass—all the worse for you, and very little better for the ass. Which of these boats can you lend me? If your people are busy, I can row myself out to the schooner."

"If you can, please do so, as I want to get this heap of baggage and stores cleared as soon as possible."

He pointed to an empty boat lying at the water's edge just beyond the two which the rest of the party were loading, and said,

"That one will serve you. It belongs to the schooner. The others we are only hiring."

"One question, monsieur. Did the chevalier reveal his identity to the girl at Grandpré?"

"I believe so."

Gwynett went down to the boat, which was painted white, with lockers at the bow and stern. He pushed it into the water, placed the sculls in the row-locks, and pulled off through the gathering dusk to the *Royal Mary*.

Before he was half-way to the schooner, a man in a cloak lounged down to the group on the beach. He looked about, kicked some of the pebbles into the water, and then

asked Macdonald, in a sulky tone, how long his men would be before they started. It was the abbé Gaultier.

"In less than ten minutes, M. l'abbé, if your patience will hold out so long."

"Patience? *Diable!* I see very little reward for acting the part of Job nowadays. Does it often happen in your experience, M. Macdonald, that one gets thanked for one's pains?"

"Eh! what gnat has bitten you, M. l'abbé?" asked Macdonald, between whom and the abbé there was evidently no love lost.

"M. Macdonald, it is all very well for M. le chevalier and you, his followers, to be put to inconvenience now and again. You are all on the road to gain something, or you think so, which comes to the same thing. But hang me if I appreciate being in the saddle or jolted in a chaise for four mortal days and nights, only to be grumbled at for not arriving sooner. I am perfectly knocked up."

"Nevertheless, M. l'abbé, it seemed to me that your fatigue did not prevent you finishing your journey on very good terms with mademoiselle Martigny."

"Pooh! one must always worship the rising sun. The girl is certainly a marvel of prettiness, and may keep in with the chevalier for some little time. Therefore, it is my business to keep in with her, and I do not deny that she facilitated the task most amiably. I flatter myself she may help to make our voyage a pleasant one, at all events. I did not neglect, by the way, to put in a good word for you."

"You are very kind. But I am afraid you have rather wasted your diplomacy. It appears she is not to go with us."

"Not go with us! But she is on board."

"She will be on shore again before long. Our escort from Nonancourt, whom I think you have not seen—M. de Starhemberg—objects to the chevalier enticing her away from home."

"Objects! Who the devil is M. de Starhemberg to object? and what if he does?"

"I fancy he will do just as he chooses, and he chooses to take mademoiselle Thekla home again. I am sorry if that

upsets any plans of yours. He is gone to the schooner now for the purpose of rowing the young lady back to shore."

"And do you mean to say the chevalier will consent?"

"I hardly suppose he will be consulted. M. de Starhemberg seems rather an obstinate kind of man, and I am afraid even your intervention would not help matters."

"But this is incredible insolence, M. Macdonald."

"You think so?"

"Yes. And I am in the mood to chastise it."

"Indeed? how?"

"By waiting for your M. de Starhemberg, and asking a little explanation from him."

Macdonald looked at the abbé for a second or two, and then, putting his hand on the other's arm, said,

"M. l'abbé, I think you will admit I do not often talk at random."

"On the contrary, monsieur."

"Well, then, listen. You will do well to leave M. de Starhemberg alone. He is here with absolute powers from the regent, and a word from him will not only stop our expedition, but consign us all to the Bastille as well. So far, he has done us most valuable service, and I must request that you do not jeopardize matters by offering him any provocation."

"But, *diable!*——"

"I go further, M. l'abbé—if need be, in the name of M. le chevalier I should absolutely forbid it."

"Forbid! That is a word I do not like, M. Macdonald."

"I hope there will be no occasion to use it; in fact, I appeal to your good sense to give no occasion. Let the matter drop, M. l'abbé. Go on board in that boat, which is just ready to push off. In half an hour we shall set sail, and these little fooleries will be part of the past. We have serious work before us, and trifling is unworthy of any of us."

The abbé was overborne, in spite of himself, by Macdonald's firmness, and acquiesced sullenly in the advice tendered. He therefore entered the wherry, which was manned by the two Kermode brothers, and rowed off to the *Royal Mary*.

When the wherry reached the schooner, the white-painted boat which Gwynett had used was found fastened to the

ladder. The abbé looked at it, and was struck by a sudden idea.

"Is that the boat in which M. de Starhemberg rowed here?" he asked of Mark Kermode.

"Yes, your honor. He is going back in it, Mr. Macdonald said."

"I daresay he won't mind taking me with him," said the abbé. "It just occurs to me I have forgotten something at my lodgings. I need not trouble any of you, my good fellows, as I see you are busy. Get on with your work, and I will wait for M. de Starhemberg."

He stepped out of the wherry, and seated himself in the stern of the white boat, while the two Kermodes unloaded the wherry into the schooner, and finally went up the ladder and disappeared. In the meantime, the abbé had lifted the stern-sheet grating, or loose flooring-board, searched about for something, and, after some seconds, seemed to find what he wanted. Then he felt in his pockets and drew out his pocketknife and a strong piece of whipcord.

"Lucky I had the string," he said to himself. "It is better not to have to ask the sailors for anything."

He occupied himself for a few minutes in the stern of the boat, looking up now and then to see if he was observed, and finally placed the oars in a certain position rather carefully. Then he stepped from the boat on to the ladder, and began to mount up towards the deck of the schooner.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW THE ABBÉ GAULTIER PUT MATTERS STRAIGHT.

I N the meantime Gwynett, as soon as he arrived on board the *Royal Mary*, had asked for the chevalier de St. George, and was told by captain Kermode that he was in the cabin. But while the captain was speaking the cabin-door opened, and the chevalier appeared in the doorway. He gave a little start on seeing Gwynett, and after a moment's hesitation said uneasily,

"Ah! M. de Starhemberg, you are good enough to come and see us off?"

"I have come for a few minutes' interview with you, monseigneur," replied Gwynett.

"Perhaps you had better come into the cabin, monsieur," replied the chevalier, turning back.

Gwynett followed into the cabin, which was a good deal encumbered with luggage, and shut the door after him. A lighted lamp hung from the ceiling, and, thanks to its light, Gwynett, looking at the chevalier, formed the opinion that he had been drinking freely. A couple of bottles of wine and a wine-glass were upon the table.

"And what have you to say to me, monsieur?" asked the chevalier, sitting down.

"Monseigneur, it may interest you to know that when I went on your behalf to Grandpré, madame Martigny, who appears to me to be a very worthy woman, raised objections on the ground that she had a young daughter, and that previous experience had determined her not to let lodgings to gentlemen from Paris or elsewhere. I assured her that in this case she might dismiss any apprehension from her mind."

"Well, monsieur?" asked the chevalier, fidgeting a little on his chair.

"Was I in error, monseigneur, in giving her that assurance?"

"I—I really know nothing about the matter, monsieur."

"I am glad to hear that, monseigneur. Then, if mademoiselle Thekla has been enticed away from Grandpré, and brought on board the *Royal Mary*, it is without your highness's knowledge or sanction?"

"*Dame!*" broke out the chevalier angrily, "I am being catechised, it seems."

"It is a very simple question that I ask, monseigneur, and I feel sure you will not object to reply."

"But I do object. I admit that you have laid me under great obligations, monseigneur, but you are now exceeding your functions. If that is all you have to say, I will wish you good evening."

"Monseigneur, as I gather from your refusal that mademoiselle Thekla is here, I request your highness to permit me to take her back to the shore and restore her to her sorrowing parent."

The chevalier turned very red, and replied doggedly,

"Monsieur, I decline to discuss the subject. Your audience is over. Be good enough to leave me."

"Monseigneur, I shall regret to have to act contrary to your wishes. Allow me at least to see mademoiselle Thekla, and invite her own decision."

"It is out of the question, monsieur."

"I press the request, monseigneur."

"Do you presume to oppose me, monsieur?"

"Monseigneur, I shall perform my obvious duty, and I hope with your concurrence. Do me the favor to summon mademoiselle Thekla, and I ask nothing more of your highness."

"I refuse, monsieur."

"Consider, monseigneur, that your refusal will relieve me from a certain obligation hitherto incumbent upon me."

"What is that, monsieur?"

"That of acting as servant, instead of master, monseigneur."

"Is this a threat, monsieur?"

"Call it a warning, monseigneur. I only venture to remind your highness that if monseigneur le régent invested me with somewhat extensive powers, it was with the intention of their being used upon occasion and according to my own judgment. Madame Martigny is a worthy subject of



his majesty the king of France, and her household is entitled to his protection. I represent his majesty, and I am here to see that she is not wronged. I trust your highness will not persist in wronging her, and thereby compel me to resort to force."

"To force, monsieur?"

At this moment the door of one of the side-cabins opened, and Thekla came out. A bright flush was on her face, and her eyes sparkled with an angry gleam.

"I have heard what monsieur has been demanding," she said, "and I come to tell him that his errand is needless."

Gwynett bowed coldly.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "madame Martigny will very properly hold me responsible for what becomes of you. In order that I may know what to say to her, perhaps you will be good enough to acquaint me with your intended arrangements. Does monseigneur le chevalier de St. George propose to marry you?"

"Certainly, monsieur," replied Thekla, with a little toss of her head.

"Where?"

"In Scotland."

"Why?"

The girl turned crimson.

"You insult me, monsieur."

"Not at all, mademoiselle. By marrying you here, he might possibly save some rag of reputation for you. In Scotland it will be ridiculous. Apart from that, he does not intend to do anything of the sort."

"Monsieur!" cried the chevalier, "you——"

Gwynett flashed round upon the chevalier, with his finger outstretched to the little golden crucifix which hung from a ribbon round the other's neck.

"Swear upon the crucifix, monseigneur, that when you arrive in Scotland to claim the throne of your fathers, you will marry this farmer's daughter."

The chevalier turned pale, and stammered a disclaimer.

"I only meant if circumstances permit, monsieur. In my position——"

Gwynett stopped him with a wave of the hand, and turned to Thekla.

"You hear that, mademoiselle. It seems to me that any

one with the intelligence of a rabbit ought to understand it. Do you understand it?"

The girl's face fell, and she began to tremble.

"Monseigneur gave me his promise," she said, with an effort at firmness. The chevalier looked away from her.

Gwynett began to think it was time to bring the scene to an end.

"Mademoiselle," he said, in cutting tones, "let us understand one another. If you are merely a strumpet, or intend to become one, well and good. But in that case I beg to assure you that you will find Scotland a very uncomfortable place for your avocation, especially after M. le chevalier has got tired of you, and handed you over to his troopers—as he intends to do."

The chevalier, who was notoriously the most lachrymose of his family, had by this time lost all his vinous courage, and was beginning to whimper.

"Monsieur," he snivelled, "you fail in respect to your prince."

"On the contrary, monseigneur," retorted Gwynett, "it is only the exaggerated respect I entertain for your highness's person that prevents me taking you by the scruff of the neck and flinging you into the sea."

"You use very violent language, monsieur," stammered the chevalier, retreating towards his sleeping-berth, and wiping his eyes.

"Mademoiselle," resumed Gwynett, "if you happen, by any chance, to desire to retain your self-respect, you will leave this ship at once. It may not be altogether pleasant, but that is neither here nor there. Possibly we can arrange, when we return to Grandpré, to put matters on a better footing. The question now is, will you come back with me of your own accord, or must I remove you by force?"

The girl looked up at Gwynett with a changed expression, and turned to face the chevalier. The latter made no sign, and Thekla's lip curled. Then she said abruptly,

"I thank you, monsieur. I will go with you."

"Have you anything to get ready?"

"Only a little parcel."

"Fetch it. I will wait for you."

Thekla went into her cabin, and the chevalier, after blowing his nose, took up one of the wine-bottles. Finding

it empty, he addressed himself to the other, poured out a glass with a shaking hand, and drank it off. Gwynett held his peace, and looked out of the stern windows.

Presently Thekla appeared in her hat and cloak. She cast a contemptuous glance at the chevalier, and said,

“Adieu, monseigneur. I am ready, M. de Starhemberg.”

Gwynett held open the cabin door for Thekla, bowed an adieu to the chevalier, and followed his companion on to the main deck.

It was now dark. The moon had risen, and a slight mist began to creep over the surface of the sea. Captain Kermode was on deck, and came forward towards the gangway-port as Gwynett emerged from the cabin.

“Good night, squire,” said he. “Shall I lend you a man to row?”

“There is no occasion, captain, thank you. Has M. Macdonald come on board yet?”

“No, squire. He will be on shore till the last. You will pass the other wherry, I expect. Mr. Macdonald will come aboard in your boat.”

Gwynett shook hands with the captain, and turned towards the gangway-port to descend the ladder, looking towards the harbor light as he did so. The risen moon was opposite him, and its reflection made a brilliant band of silver on the sea from the shore to the ship's side.

Just at this moment a man's head and shoulders, silhouetted in black against the glittering wavelets, rose suddenly into view at the top of the ladder. The newcomer lifted his head to see who was the person standing in the gangway-port. Then he started violently, uttered a gasping cry of amazement and terror, and fell backwards off the ladder into the wherry below.

Kermode was leaning against the bulwark close at hand, and looked over.

“Hallo!” he remarked, “that's one of our passengers. Looks as if he were stunned. Here, Luke and Mark!” he called to his half-brothers, “bear a hand.”

He descended the ladder into the empty wherry, followed by the two sailors, and turned over the senseless form of the abbé Gaultier, whose face was deluged with blood from a cut on the forehead.

"Let's get him aboard," said captain Kermode. "Mayhap some of his ribs are broken."

With some little difficulty the three Kermodes lifted the abbé, still unconscious, up to the deck, and carried him into the cabin to have his injuries seen to. Gwynett offered his services in the matter, but captain Kermode declined them.

"Much obliged, squire," he said, "but time's getting on, and unless Mr. Macdonald has your boat, we shall lose the ebb waiting for him. The gentleman's only stunned."

Gwynett nodded assent, and helped Thekla from the wherry into the stern seat of the white boat, which lay outside.

"Do you know that gentleman, monsieur?" she asked, as she sat down.

"Not at all, mademoiselle," replied Gwynett, who had seen nothing of the abbé's face; "do you?"

But Thekla did not answer, and Gwynett, after unfastening the painter, took his seat to row. As he shipped the oars in the row-locks he felt a smart tug from one of them, and noticed a piece of twine dangling from the handle.

He pulled away towards the shore rather vigorously, as the mist was beginning to thicken, and the town lights were already lost to sight. The moon helped to direct his course, but before he had rowed a couple of hundred yards this had almost disappeared. A few minutes later an exclamation from Thekla was followed by the cry,

"My feet are in the water, monsieur!"

Gwynett looked down. The boat was filling, and the water was already over the stern-sheet grating. He instantly unshipped the oars, pushed the grating under his seat, and felt about under the water.

"The plug is gone," he said hurriedly. "Have you a handkerchief? I gave mine to the captain for that passenger."

Thekla passed him a piece of fabric which was perfectly useless for the purpose, and Gwynett then bethought him of his cravat. He was tearing it from round his neck when Thekla, thoroughly frightened, stood up and began to scream. The boat lurched violently, and Gwynett was flung against the side.

"For heaven's sake, mademoiselle," he cried, "sit down and keep still!"

He knelt again in the water, and was feeling for the plughole with one hand while he held his cravat in the other, when Thekla's frantic wringing of her hands made the boat keel over again. This time the gunwale went under water, and before Gwynett could fling himself to the other side to restore the balance, the boat sank without a moment's warning.

Thekla fell forward over Gwynett with a shriek that could be heard all over the harbor, and the pair disappeared under the waves. By exerting his utmost strength, Gwynett managed to free himself from the strangling grip of his terrified companion, and rose to the surface, holding her at arms' length while he trod the water.

Two or three hails came across the mist-covered sea, and the sound of oars in the row-locks could be heard. As soon as he could spare his breath, Gwynett shouted to direct the course of the rescuers, and in the meantime tried to reach the stern-sheet grating which was floating near. The approaching boat, which was the second wherry on its way to the *Royal Mary*, came up rapidly and was upon him almost before he could cry out a warning. Its impetus carried it a little too far, and the steersman was only able, in passing, to seize the now unconscious Thekla by the arm. As he did so he called to the stroke to back water. In his excitement the man flung his oar backwards just over Gwynett's head. It fell upon him with the force of a sledge-hammer, stunning him instantly, and he sank like a stone.

* * * * *

When the abbé Gaultier was carried into the cabin of the *Royal Mary*, his face was washed and it was found that there was no apparent injury except the cut on the forehead, which was plastered up without delay. A minute or two later the abbé came to himself, and asked for brandy. This was promptly forthcoming, and the abbé swallowed a stiff bumper. This revived him considerably, although he seemed to be much shaken both in body and mind.

"How did this accident happen, abbé?" asked the chevalier rather curiously.

"*Diable!*" muttered the abbé, "I hardly know. I was at

the top of the ladder, and lost my hold. In falling my head caught the gunwale of the wherry, and that is all I recollect. Give me some more brandy."

He swallowed half a tumblerful, and looked up furtively at Kermode, who stood by the table.

"By the way, captain," he asked, "was anyone on deck by the gangway-port when I fell?"

"I was close by, your honor. So was M. de Starhemberg. But not near enough to catch you."

"No one else?"

"No, your honor."

Gaultier looked a little puzzled, and his gaze wandered vaguely round the cabin.

"Evidently it was my fancy," he said to himself. "And yet——"

He poured out some more brandy, and said to the chevalier,

"Monseigneur, I have some matters to speak to you about in private."

At a sign from the chevalier Kermode and his two half-brothers left the cabin, and the abbé proceeded.

"Where is this M. de Starhemberg, monseigneur?"

"Gone. And I hope to the devil," replied the chevalier amiably.

"Ah! And mademoiselle Martigny?"

"Gone with him."

The abbé staggered to his feet rather excitedly.

"How long ago, monseigneur?" he asked.

"Perhaps eight or ten minutes, abbé."

Gaultier swallowed the brandy he had poured out, and took one or two unsteady steps forward.

"Monseigneur," he said, "do me the great favor to lend me your arm to the deck. I feel very faint, and this place seems dreadfully stuffy."

"Very willingly, M. l'abbé."

The chevalier and Gaultier went out arm in arm upon the main deck. The fog covered the water, and nothing could be seen in the direction of the town. All was quiet, save for the lapping of the wavelets against the schooner's side.

The abbé looked towards the shore, and listened eagerly for a few seconds. Presently there came the sound of cries

and a shout, and the abbé leaned forward over the bulwarks with an expression of intense interest on his pallid face. Then a woman's scream, distant but piercing, rang through the air. The abbé burst out laughing.

"That is it," he chuckled. "The fog comes in remarkably well. It might have been arranged on purpose."

"What was that cry, abbé?" asked the chevalier. "Do you understand it?"

"Monseigneur," replied the abbé, with the air of a man very well satisfied with himself, "I have settled a little score with someone who has annoyed me, and I presume you also—M. de Starhemberg."

"Curse the meddling bully!" snarled the chevalier venomously. "You may well talk of annoyance. I was never treated with such insolence before. He has carried off Thekla."

"With her ready concurrence, may I ask?"

"She was influenced by his violence—that was quite clear. But what have you done?"

"Monseigneur, when I got here, I found the boat still alongside in which this fellow had rowed from the shore, and the men said he was going back in it. It occurred to me that it would serve him out for his officious interference if the boat sank while he was returning. So I looked about under the loose floor, found the plug, and tied a piece of string very firmly to it. The other end of the string I passed through the floor-board, and secured to one of the oars. Then I kicked the plug until it was nearly loose, and came away."

"Well, what is the use of all that?"

"The use of all that, monseigneur, is that the first movement of the oar has pulled the plug out. If things have gone well, the boat has filled and sunk, and if they have gone better still, both monsieur and mademoiselle are by this time food for fishes."

The chevalier looked at the abbé with a certain dubious admiration.

"That was decidedly clever of you, abbé," he remarked. "Only, if you are right in your expectation, there will unfortunately be a boat to be paid for. We are only hiring these wherries."

"It was not one of the wherries," explained the abbé. "They told me it was the schooner's own boat."

The chevalier started.

"What!" he cried, "the small white boat?"

"Yes," replied the abbé.

"With lockers in the bow and stern?" gasped the chevalier, in horror-stricken tones.

"That was so, now you describe it."

The chevalier flung his hat down on the deck with a furious execration.

"Damnation!" he yelled, "you have ruined the expedition—destroyed us!"

"What on earth——" began the abbé, thinking his companion had suddenly gone mad.

"You fool!" screamed the chevalier, shaking his fist in the other's face, "you ass, you pig, you unspeakable idiot! All the treasure of the expedition was in those lockers. You have sent twenty-seven thousand louis d'or to the bottom of the sea!"

Gaultier was struck speechless, while the chevalier, frantic with rage and disappointment, raved and cursed till he was too hoarse and breathless to utter any intelligible sound.

The abbé did not reply by a single word. He stood for several seconds livid and trembling, his ears deaf to the storm of vituperation poured into them, and his eyes staring into vacancy. Then he gave a little shudder, passed his tongue over his dry lips, and whispered to himself,

"I was right after all. It was that demon Ambrose Gwynett, and they have let him loose from hell to undo me."

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW M. DE BAUGÉ CAME TO THE HOTEL CROISSY.

IT was on a Saturday afternoon, as has been mentioned, that Gwynett had returned from Havre to St. Malo.

The following Wednesday evening a gentleman rode into Paris, and went to the Palais-Royal to ask for an audience of the regent. He was told that monseigneur was spending the evening at M. de Torcy's hôtel, and that he might possibly be able to see him there. The visitor accordingly directed his steps towards the hôtel Croissy, the town house of the mother of the marquis, and the one he had usually occupied since the court had been transferred from Versailles to Paris.

The party at the hôtel Croissy was only a small one, and included M. de Lavalaye and his wife, the abbé Dubois, and madame de Valincour. Lord Stair had been present earlier in the evening, but had left. The countess of Stair had not accompanied him, as she was expecting to become a mother in the course of a few weeks, and had for the time being ceased to go into society. The earl had kept exceedingly quiet about the proceedings of the Stuart partisans since the interview with the regent already recorded, and both the latter and Dubois inferred therefrom that he was awaiting, probably with a good deal of impatience and surprise, a message from colonel Douglas.

The comtesse de Valincour had been duly informed of Gwynett's mission, and of his successive reports thereon, by the abbé Dubois. On this particular evening the two had been discussing the unexplained absence of news from St. Malo during the last few days. It should be remembered that Gwynett's real name was known only to the regent, de Torcy, and the Lavalayes, while madame de Valincour and Dubois, in common with the rest of the world, had no idea that that of Starhemberg was an assumed one.

"Our last news was sent off on Thursday," the abbé was saying. "M. de Starhemberg was then starting for Havre to find out why the hired vessel was not at St. Malo as had been arranged."

"It is an unfortunate hitch," said the comtesse, who had heard nothing from her brother since his departure, and was rather wondering if his plans with regard to the M. de Vaudémont's gift had arrived any nearer fruition. "It gives time for admiral Byng to make discoveries."

"With all deference to you, comtesse, I think it is a pity he has not been enabled to make some before."

"We agreed, abbé, to leave that matter alone for a little. As I told you, it suits some plans of my brother's to let things go to a certain length, and so long as lord Stair makes no demands he has not the smallest ground for dissatisfaction with the regent's government. As for M. de Starhemberg, I think he has saved us from a considerable scandal."

"I do not say the contrary," replied Dubois. "But I should have preferred, on the whole, that your brother had not had that fine idea of his at Commercy. We are not out of the wood yet, in spite of M. de Starhemberg."

The regent was coming up to join in the discussion when word was brought to him that a visitor had called who was anxious to see him.

"His name is the chevalier de Baugé, monseigneur," said the servant, "and he comes from St. Malo."

The regent exchanged a glance with Dubois, and went out to the reception-room where the visitor was waiting. De Baugé rose and bowed as the regent entered.

"You wish to speak to me, M. de Baugé?" asked the regent, returning the other's salutation.

"Yes, monseigneur. Permit me to introduce myself as the son of M. le baron de Baugé, grand prévôt de la Haute Normandie."

"I knew your father very well some years ago," said the regent, shaking hands with the visitor. "I hope his health is improved. I heard of him recently through a friend of mine who had occasion to see him."

"M. de Starhemberg, probably."

"Yes."

"It is about that gentleman that I have called upon you,

monseigneur. I was recommended to apply to you for information respecting M. de Starhemberg's family."

"Recommended by whom, monsieur?"

"By a certain M. Macdonald, monseigneur, whom I met at St. Malo, and who knew M. de Starhemberg."

The regent looked curiously at the visitor.

"I do not know M. Macdonald," he said. "Although I know M. de Starhemberg, unfortunately I can tell you nothing about his family."

"Whom can I ask, monseigneur? It is a very unfortunate affair."

"What is, monsieur?"

"About M. de Starhemberg. He is dead."

"Dead!"

"Yes, monseigneur. He was drowned last Saturday night in the harbor of St. Malo. I have come to Paris to acquaint his relatives, if I can hear of any, with the regrettable news."

The regent looked at de Baugé for some seconds without speaking. He seemed to breathe with difficulty, and his voice, when he at last spoke, was so altered that de Baugé was almost startled.

"I am very sorry to hear this, monsieur. Do you happen to know the details?"

De Baugé hesitated for a moment, and then said,

"Monseigneur, I understood from M. de Starhemberg, with whom I had been only a few days acquainted, that some friends of his were on the point of leaving St. Malo by ship, and he parted from me to go on board and say good-bye to them. On returning, his boat sank, and he disappeared."

"How was that known?"

"His shouts were heard, monseigneur, by M. Macdonald—one of the friends I spoke of—and some of the sailors of the ship, who were rowing to it from the shore. They came up to him as he was swimming, but most unluckily one of them by mischance struck him on the head with his oar. It must have stunned him, for he sank instantly, and they saw no more of him."

"And when did you hear of it, monsieur?"

"Almost at once, monseigneur. I was on the beach

when the boat returned to the shore with M. de Starhemberg's companion."

"He was not alone, then?"

"No, monseigneur. He was bringing back from the ship a young lady, who was rescued alive, but unconscious. She was known to me—in fact, she is a neighbor of ours at Boissy, near Nonancourt. She soon came to herself, and I took charge of her and escorted her home to her family. M. Macdonald, in the meantime, embarked, after asking me to acquaint you with M. de Starhemberg's sad fate."

The regent received these details in silence, and after a pause said,

"Monsieur, I am indebted to you for the trouble you have taken in this matter. I will charge myself with the duty of informing such relatives and friends of M. de Starhemberg as I may be able to find. Are you making any stay in Paris?"

"No, monseigneur. I return home to-morrow."

"Do me the favor to convey my compliments to M. le baron de Bauge."

"He will be greatly honored by your message, monseigneur."

De Bauge took his departure, and the regent went back to the salon. His unusual gravity and preoccupied air very soon attracted notice, but no one cared to evince any curiosity by asking questions. Finally he said to de Torcy,

"M. le marquis, I am sorry to do or say anything to interfere with the pleasure of the evening, but as a matter of fact, I have just received some bad news—news which I am sure you will hear with as much regret as myself. Our friend M. de Starhemberg is dead."

The marquis uttered an exclamation, and the regent went on,

"He was accidentally drowned on Saturday night, in the harbor of St. Malo. My informant was on the shore at the time, and heard of the affair within a few minutes of its occurrence."

In speaking to de Torcy the regent had been standing with his back to a group composed of the guests already mentioned. The sound of a little disturbance from this group caused him to turn round suddenly, and he saw one

of the ladies lying on the floor. Hastening with some others to her assistance, he found it was madame de Valincour, and that she had fainted. The comtesse was lifted on to a sofa, and restoratives were sent for, while madame de Lavalaye remarked to the regent in explanation,

"Monseigneur, we were all listening to your news, when madame la comtesse fell to the ground before any of us could reach her."

"The comtesse is very sensitive," put in Dubois, with prompt diplomacy, "and monseigneur will permit me to say that his news might have been broken a little more gently. The comtesse has, of course, regarded M. de Starhemberg as one of her intimate friends, and it is not surprising that the sudden shock has been too much for her."

The regent nodded assentingly.

"M. l'abbé is quite right," he said to madame de Lavalaye. "May I ask, madame, that you will be so kind as to bestow your care upon madame la comtesse until she comes to herself again? And in the meantime the rest of us will make no further demands upon your hospitality to-night."

The party broke up at this hint, and left the salon to madame de Lavalaye and the marquise de Croissy's maids. The regent and Dubois waited with de Torcy in the library until word was brought by Lavalaye that the comtesse had recovered consciousness.

"My wife," he said, "has been trying to persuade madame de Valincour to remain here till morning, in order to keep her company. But the comtesse prefers to go straight home, monseigneur, and asks you to excuse her saying good night."

"That is all right," said the regent. "My thanks to the ladies, M. de Lavalaye. Marquis, I must apologize for upsetting your circle, but at the moment I had really no thought except for the loss we have sustained. Come, abbé."

The regent entered his carriage with Dubois, and drove home to the Palais-Royal. Nothing was said on the way, and Dubois continued to preserve a discreet silence while his companion alighted and led the way to his private cabinet. The regent dropped into a chair, rang for wine, and drank a couple of glasses without taking any notice of

the abbé's presence. At last the latter decided to break the ice.

"This is an unfortunate business, monseigneur," he remarked.

The regent raised his head slowly to look at Dubois, and then let it fall again.

"Yes," he replied, half to himself—"a damnable business. And it was I who set it going. That sticks in my gizzard. I shall never forgive myself—never."

"Monseigneur, no one can foresee accidents of this sort. And certainly no pressure was put upon M. de Starhemberg to undertake the affair—he accepted it quite willingly. No blame attaches to you or anyone in the matter."

"What has that to do with it? It will not bring him back to life again. I have not felt such a sense of irreparable loss since Louis de Bourgogne died. One does not meet men like the dauphin and M. de Starhemberg thrice in a lifetime. I doubt if that fact weighs as much with you as with me, abbé. I doubt still more if there is anything about my feelings in the matter that you can in the least understand."

"I dare say not, monseigneur."

"It is not your fault, perhaps. But you would be none the worse for understanding. Now it is too late."

The regent rose from his chair, and, with a sign of dismissal to the abbé, went away to his laboratory. The lights and fires were lit there, as was usual whether the room was to be used or not. Everything lay undisturbed as it had been left on the occasion of Gwynett accepting the mission to follow and protect the chevalier de St. George. His blouse and apron hung from the hook where he had placed them while the regent was writing out his warrant of plenary powers. The drawer was open from which the writing materials and the rouleaux of Louis d'Or had been taken. The regent walked to the cabinet and shut the drawer with a half-shudder. Then he rang a bell, and seated himself in the easy-chair before the fire. The Nuremberg clock on the laboratory wall was striking eight as the servant entered in response to the summons.

"I shall want nothing more to-night," said the regent.

The valet bowed, and withdrew. The regent leaned

back in his chair, and gazed at the embers of the cedar-wood fire in the grate.

"This looks like the last of my friendships," he thought. "All the others—what are they? Self-seekers, the best of them. If I were not the duc d'Orléans, or the regent, but a plain gentleman from whom nothing was to be gained, how many of my dear friends would trouble themselves about my existence? Poor Louis! he often used to say a king could hope for everything except a friend. And fate seems to prove him right, after all."

He rose and moved restlessly about the room for a minute or two. Then he stopped before the fire.

"It is singular," he said to himself. "From what de Torcy told me, de Starhemberg always met with his misfortunes in serving his friends. All the more reason why he should not have been sent on this errand. It almost makes one believe in destiny—especially after that evening at madame d'Argenton's."

He sat down again, and fell into a brown study, recalling one after another of the incidents which had connected him with Gwynett. Little by little his eyes closed, and he only opened them once or twice when a half-burnt log of wood in the grate fell with a crash into a fresh position. Then he sank to sleep.

A couple of minutes later the door of the laboratory opened, and Gwynett walked in.

He noticed the regent sitting in the arm-chair, but saw that he was asleep and took care not to disturb him. He divested himself of his cloak and coat, hung them up with his hat, and put on his working blouse and apron to resume the work upon which he had been engaged before his departure for Nonancourt.

The regent's nap did not last very long. When he awoke and opened his eyes they fell upon Gwynett's hat and cloak, which were hanging exactly opposite to him. For a moment the force of habit prevented his being in any way struck by what he saw. Then a confused wonder began to steal over him, and he gazed at the cloak for several seconds till a slight sound to his left reached his ear, and caused him to turn his head. Gwynett was standing by one of the dressers, holding a test-tube up against the light, and letting a re-agent fall into it drop by drop.

"Evidently I am dreaming," thought the regent. "Still it is a consolation to have dreams as vivid as this. I should very much like to see his face."

He watched Gwynett for some seconds, and then, making an effort, said aloud,

"Good evening, M. de Starhemberg."

"Good evening, monseigneur," replied Gwynett, with his eyes still fixed on the test-tube.

"This is not altogether like a dream," mused the regent. "Can it be possible——"

He looked at the cloak again, and remarked aloud,

"Either I have been dreaming, M. de Starhemberg, or somebody has been saying you were drowned."

"Possibly both, monseigneur. Certainly, I have been drowned."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the regent, half to himself. He looked at Gwynett again very hard, and after a pause asked,

"Really drowned, M. de Starhemberg?"

"Yes—for all practical purposes, monseigneur. Luckily, there was a friend of mine there, from Calais, who has a theory of resuscitation of drowned persons. He put it into operation with me, and, as you see, successfully. After he had brought me back to life, he insisted on my staying in bed for a day or two, or I should have been here before."

"All this is astounding. But I am enormously glad to see you again. I was at de Torcy's this evening, when a certain M. de Baugé brought us the news of your death."

"I was not aware of his taking that step."

"He said Macdonald had sent him."

"Very likely, monseigneur. M. Macdonald would naturally only know of my sinking, and, like M. de Baugé, had no idea of what happened later."

"And what was that?"

"Perhaps, monseigneur, I had better complete my report of what has occurred since I started for Havre."

Gwynett proceeded to detail his experiences up to the time of the rescue of Thekla and his own mishap at the hands of the boat's crew which came to their assistance.

"From what I am told, monseigneur, the wherry rowed round and round for some little time in the hope of my

coming to the surface again. Then they gave it up as hopeless, and took mademoiselle Martigny to the shore, where it happened that M. de Baugé was talking to M. Macdonald. M. de Baugé at once took charge of her, had her removed to the 'Trois Matelots,' and with the assistance of the landlady, got her a change of clothing. After that, as she seemed none the worse for her dipping, he took her away in a post-chaise. M. Macdonald had by this time gone on board the *Royal Mary* in the wherry. But in the meanwhile, one of the local fishermen, who was close to the place where I had sunk, in drawing up his line found that it had caught in my cloak, and my apparently lifeless body was thus brought to the surface. This man had heard of Dr. Vidal's experiment at Calais. Partly out of curiosity, and partly in the hope of reward, he rowed ashore and carried me to the doctor's house. M. Vidal at once set to work to try and resuscitate me, in the manner I have already mentioned to you, and, after three hours' unceasing effort, was successful."

"And were you none the worse for your experience?"

"I was very weak at first. But a couple of days' and nights' rest set me right again. I left St. Malo yesterday in a comfortable travelling-carriage, and have just arrived."

"Certainly you look very much as usual, and I hope your health will not suffer. So M. le chevalier de St. George is off at last?"

"I do not know, monseigneur."

"*Diable!* how is that?"

"It appears, monseigneur, that as the *Royal Mary* was weighing anchor, a fishing-boat brought the news that admiral Byng was off the port. Although all the papers were in order for both ship and passengers, the chevalier must have taken fright, for he came ashore again at once with a companion—probably one of his suite. The *Royal Mary*, however, set sail, and went out with the tide. Whether the admiral followed her or not, I don't know. But in the morning none of his vessels were in sight."

"And what became of the chevalier?"

"From what I learned at the inn where he stayed, I imagine that he and his companion must have decided to meet the *Royal Mary* at some other port—probably Dun-

kerque, as the papers were made out for that place. The two gentlemen hired horses the next morning, and rode away in the direction of Havre. They had thus more than twenty-four hours' start of any pursuit I could have made. In view of the new turn things had taken, I thought it better to come back to Paris, and report to you in person. I may point out to you, monseigneur, that I considered my mission at an end when I had seen M. le chevalier de St. George safely on board the *Royal Mary*; and I will add, that as far as my own wishes are concerned I do not desire to have anything more to do with M. le chevalier."

"Let him go to the devil," remarked the regent. "I always had the lowest opinion of him, and certainly your story does nothing to raise it. But as to your friend, M. Vidal—does he live at St. Malo?"

"Yes, monseigneur. But he is at the moment in Paris, in my apartments. He had occasion to come here on some business, and travelled up with me."

The regent went to his *escritoire*, wrote on a sheet of paper, and handed it to Gwynett. The latter read:

"M. le docteur Vidal is hereby appointed physician-in-chief to monseigneur le régent in Paris.

"PHILIPPE."

"Do me the favor, M. de Starhemberg," said the regent, "to transmit that to your ingenious friend. A man who has ideas of that sort is worth his weight in gold. To find a doctor putting breath into dead bodies is revolutionary. Usually, they rob live ones of the little they have to spare."

"It will be a great gratification to him, monseigneur."

"I shall be the grateful and obliged person, if he will accept the post. Besides, it will make Fagon furious. That will be a comfortable thing for me to reflect upon."

"In the meantime, monseigneur, as it appears M. de Torcy has heard of my accident, I should like him to know of my safe return."

"I will send to him at once; also to madame de Valincour, who took the matter worse than any of us—in fact, she fainted. I confess I blurted the news out rather clumsily. And now let us have supper. I give you my word of honor that half an hour ago I never expected to swallow a mouthful with any comfort again."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT LORD STAIR'S.

ADIEU, my dear madame de Lavalaye, and a thousand apologies. I am really quite ashamed of giving you all so much trouble. Adieu, M. de Torcy."

"Adieu, comtesse. We shall hope to hear of your complete recovery in the morning."

"That will go without saying, M. le marquis."

Madame de Valincour drove off home, and M. de Torcy returned with the Lavalayes to the salon.

"This is a truly shocking affair," he observed. "I am sure monseigneur will feel it very much. He had come to have a great regard for poor M. de Starhemberg. As for myself, I could not have a higher regard for anyone."

"It looks as if you and madame de Valincour were rather of one mind," put in Victoire.

"It was a little awkward for monseigneur, that fainting, certainly," assented the marquis.

"He did not seem to take much notice," said Lavalaye.

"Pooh! my dear fellow, M. d'Orléans can see nothing as well as most people, when it suits him."

"That is all very well," said Victoire. "But I should like to know what René would have said—and especially what he would have thought—if I had happened to faint, instead of madame de Valincour."

"A diplomatist should always decline to answer hypothetical questions," replied the marquis, "and I forbid you to get René into bad habits."

Victoire shook her head with a wise air.

"You may say what you like," she persisted. "But I could have told you before that madame de Valincour was very fond of M. de Starhemberg. I have watched her more than once at her house, when he has been there."

"I always said that the comtesse had excellent taste," remarked the marquis. "But certainly until now I never

suspected her of having a heart. All the worse for her, perhaps, if she has."

At this moment there was a rather imperative knocking at the hall door of the hôtel, and the servant who answered it announced that lord Stair's confidential valet urgently desired to see M. de Torcy. The marquis waved an assent, and the valet was ushered into the salon.

"I beg a thousand pardons, M. le marquis," said he, "for intruding upon you, but we are seeking his lordship and cannot learn where he is. His house has been on fire."

"On fire! is it still burning?"

"No, M. le marquis—at least, nothing to speak of. The servants and grooms had managed to get the flames under before I left the house. But her ladyship is very ill indeed—in fact, the child has been born prematurely, and we are most anxious to find lord Stair."

"He left here an hour ago," replied de Torcy. "We thought he was going home. He must have made another call elsewhere."

Inquiry was made among the servants at the hôtel Croissy, but it did not appear that anyone had heard the destination of the earl's carriage when he had driven away earlier in the evening.

"Madame de Caylus has her salon to-night," suggested the marquis finally. "You may find milord Stair there. In the meantime I will send a messenger to monseigneur le régent, who ought certainly to be informed of this unfortunate occurrence."

The valet expressed his thanks and retired, while M. de Torcy ordered his sedan chair.

"On second thoughts," he said to Lavalaye, "I will go myself to the Palais-Royal, and learn a few more particulars about poor M. de Starhemberg. I suppose the gentleman who brought the news to monseigneur must have given some details, although we did not hear them."

The marquis went off in his chair to the Palais-Royal, and thereby missed the regent's messenger, who had been sent to inform him of Gwynett's return. Asking for the regent, he was invited to join him at the supper-table. He followed the gentleman-in-waiting to the duke's cabinet, where private meals were usually served, and was

rather surprised at hearing a peal of laughter from the regent just as the door was opened.

"*Peste!*" he muttered to himself, "the duke is bearing his loss with more resignation than I expected."

He advanced into the room and stopped suddenly, petrified with astonishment at the sight of Gwynett facing him across the table. Reminiscences of his host's fondness for practical joking flashed across his mind, and he remarked to the regent, with a considerable amount of annoyance,

"I must congratulate you, monseigneur, on the success of your little trick. At the same time, I am afraid the ladies will be rather backward in expressing their gratitude to you for it."

"Trick!" echoed the regent. "My dear marquis, you were never more mistaken in your life. When M. de Starhemberg came in half an hour ago, I took him for a ghost, on my honor. Have you not had my message about him?"

"No. Probably I passed the messenger on the way. But this is really a second edition of a former surprise of mine, when M. de Starhemberg arrived at Versailles the morning of the king's death. Was it all a mistake, then, chevalier?"

Gwynett briefly repeated the explanation already given to the regent, and expressed his regret that there should have been needless concern on his account.

"I had no idea of M. de Baugé's visit," he said, "or I should of course have hastened to put matters straight."

"But if you were not aware of the chevalier's safe return," asked the regent, "what happy thought brings you here now, marquis?"

"Nothing particularly happy, at all events for milord Stair," replied the marquis.

"What is the matter?"

The marquis recounted the valet's message, and the regent at once rose from the table.

"My dear chevalier," he asked, "do you suppose your estimable Dr. Vidal has gone to bed yet?"

"Probably not, monseigneur."

"Then let us send for him to go to the hôtel Stair. The

chances are that they need some man there who has a grain of sense. We will go also, if you are not too tired."

"I am quite ready, monseigneur. Allow me first to write a note to Dr. Vidal."

The note was written and despatched, and the party put on their hats and cloaks.

"It is a fine night," remarked the regent, "and we can walk there before the carriage can be brought round. Let us be off."

At the hôtel Stair a crowd of curious onlookers nearly blocked the entrance. Smoke was still issuing from some of the windows, and within the building everything was in confusion. The countess was in the hands of Dr. Fagon and another medical man, who were quarrelling furiously, and the patient was reported to be unconscious.

On inquiry, the regent was informed by the steward of the household that when the alarm of fire was given the countess was in bed, quite alone, and unprovided with a light. No one had replied to her call for help, and in her terror and bewilderment she had sprung from the couch, fallen over some article of furniture, and remained lying helpless on the floor for nearly a quarter of an hour before assistance was rendered. Her accouchement had been expected, as before mentioned, in a few weeks. But the double shock of the fright and the fall had brought matters to a premature crisis, and when she was found by her maids, the child, a boy, was already born. The excitement of the fire and the illness of the countess had disorganized the whole household, and the dispute between the two doctors who had been summoned had only increased the confusion.

The arrival a few minutes later of the earl, simultaneously with that of Dr. Vidal, offered a chance of something like order being restored, and the regent promptly took matters in hand. He came out of the countess's boudoir to meet the breathless earl, as the latter, followed by Vidal, rushed up the stairs, and shook him by the hand.

"My dear milord Stair," he said, "the condition of madame de Stair is very critical—so critical that I have sent for my own first physician to take charge of her, if you have no objection."

"Objection!" cried the earl. "Good Lord! no—you are exceedingly kind to help us in the matter. Is he here?"

Gwynett silently indicated Vidal to the regent, who went on,

"Permit me to introduce to you M. le docteur Vidal. I will clear the coast for him."

He signed to the steward, and said to him aside,

"Tell Dr. Fagon, privately, that the regent particularly wishes to see him in the library. When he is there, tell the other doctor that the regent particularly wishes to see him in the dining-room. You understand?"

The steward bowed appreciatively, and went off to the door of the countess's room. Presently the wrangle between the two medicos ceased, and their footsteps could be heard successively descending the side staircase to the ground floor. The regent nodded to Vidal, and pointed to the ante-chamber door.

"Now is your time, M. Vidal," he said. "Milord will take you in."

The earl and the doctor disappeared through the ante-chamber into the bedroom, and two or three maids were promptly turned out, leaving with the patient only the nurse, who was luckily in the house at the time of the disaster. According to the maids, the child had been dead some little time, and the earl was quite crushed by the news which met him on entering.

"That will be a terrible blow for M. de Stair," remarked de Torcy to Gwynett. "He has been building everything on the birth of an heir to the earldom."

Presently the doctor came back, signed to the three gentlemen to enter the dressing-room next the bedroom, and locked the outer door.

"M. de Starhemberg," he said quickly, "the countess is recovering consciousness, and asking for the baby. Of course it is dead. We cannot tell her that, and if she insists on seeing the child, it will throw her back to refuse. Does she know you by sight?"

"I think not."

"Could you put her to sleep?"

"Possibly."

"Come and try."

The doctor and Gwynett entered the bedroom just as a feeble voice from the pillow asked,

"Why do you not give me the baby?"

"We are attending to it, madame," replied Vidal.

"Show it me."

"In a moment, madame. I wish my colleague to examine the wound on your head, which you received in your fall."

Vidal made way for Gwynett, who went behind the countess, and said,

"Be good enough to close your eyes, madame. I shall only detain you two or three minutes."

He placed his hands gently on the countess's temples, and breathed on her forehead, while Vidal signed to the earl and the nurse to keep silence. The countess lay still, and her hurried breathing became regular. A couple of minutes elapsed, and Gwynett rose.

"I think madame is asleep," he said, watching her face.

The patient took no notice of the remark, but lay peacefully with closed eyes. Gwynett raised her hand and arm, to place them in a more comfortable position, but the countess did not stir.

"That will do for the present," he said to Vidal. "Where is the child?"

The nurse pointed to a little heap of wool in a wicker tray on the table, by which the earl was sitting with his face buried in his hands. Gwynett went across with the doctor, and uncovered the little white form, whose icy coldness told its own tale.

"How long has it been dead?" he asked Vidal.

"Probably twenty minutes."

"More than that, monsieur," put in the nurse.

"Did it live at all?"

"It was quite warm when we came and found madame on the floor," replied the nurse. "But we don't know whether it breathed afterwards."

"Was it possible to do anything, M. Vidal?"

Vidal shrugged his shoulders.

"Not since my own arrival," he replied. "I found it then as you see it now."

Gwynett looked at the child's body for a moment or two, and then whispered to Vidal,

"I will try something."

He took up the little fragment of humanity, wrapped in its covering of wool, and carried it into the adjoining dressing-room, where there was a broad settee. Laying it down upon the cushions, he knelt before it, and took the tiny arms and shoulders within his two hands. Then he bowed his head upon the cold breast and breathed deeply and regularly upon it.

The regent and de Torcy looked on with some surprise, and the former cast an inquiring glance upon the marquis. He was evidently under the impression that Gwynett was performing some Protestant act of devotion, and accordingly assumed an expression of decorous solemnity which almost brought a smile to the face of de Torcy.

Several minutes passed, and Vidal, watching intently, noticed a faint flush begin to spread over the pallid limbs of the child. Gwynett continued to breathe upon its chest, holding its hands and arms as before. A little later the lips parted slightly once or twice, and the rosy color deepened. Then the tiny features quivered, puckered up, and became placid again. Gwynett persevered without a pause in his operations. By-and-by the lips parted again and remained open, and the eyelids trembled slightly. The next moment the ghost of a sound, hardly louder than that from a newly born kitten, came from the child's lungs. It was repeated, and Gwynett raised his head.

"The child lives," he said to Vidal.*

"Wonderful!" muttered the doctor under his breath, while the regent and de Torcy looked on in complete stupefaction.

Gwynett replaced the folds of wool over the child's body, and said to Vidal,

"Let the nurse have it now. And then, doctor, you must help me up. This sort of thing takes a good deal out of one."

While the nurse removed the baby, Vidal and de Torcy came to render Gwynett the assistance he requested, and were surprised to find that he was so utterly exhausted as to be unable either to rise unaided or to keep his feet when

* The subject of an experiment identical with that here described, and equally successful, is amongst the writer's acquaintance.

placed upon them. He was helped to an easy-chair, and sat there while lord Stair, who could scarcely believe his eyes when the nurse carried to him the living and breathing body of his son and heir, overwhelmed him with expressions of gratitude and wonder.

"I can never repay this obligation, M. de Starhemberg," he said fervently.

"I am not so sure of that, milord," observed the regent, mindful of Gwynett's equivocal position in the eye of the law. "An opportunity may perhaps come your way before you expect it. But it just occurs to me that I have kept Dr. Fagon and his colleague waiting all this time. I think I had better go and appease them."

The regent left the room, and was absent several minutes. When he came back he held some letters in his hand.

"My secretary has come round after me," he said to Gwynett, "and he brings some letters which have arrived this moment from England. There is one for you, also, M. le chevalier."

Gwynett took the letter held out to him by the regent, and opened it. It was from his lawyer, Mr. Wrottesley, and ran:

"CANTERBURY, *November 10th, 1715.*

"DEAR GWYNETT,

"So far, I am sorry to say, we are still without news either of mistress Dorrington or her father, or of the Wrays in America. But to-day I heard from a correspondent at Peterhead that Noel Wray went to Scotland with lieutenant-general Hamilton in September, to join the forces under lord Mar, who is awaiting the arrival of the Pretender in Fifeshire. He was last seen with the regiment under colonel Hay. This is rather an unfortunate outcome of his yearning to go a-soldiering, but I suppose he thought he might not easily get another opportunity. Why he chose to serve the Pretender instead of king George I don't know, unless it was out of respect for your memory. He always supposed you to be a rampant Jacobite.

"Your old friend, PETER WROTTESLEY."

Gwynett read this letter with a feeling of intense dissatisfaction.

"This is a deplorably bad job," he said to himself. "And still worse if I am in any indirect way responsible for it. Certainly I used long ago to air a good deal of nonsense about the Stuarts, father and son. But I should rather astonish master Noel if I could give him my present opinion of M. le chevalier de St. George. Something ought to be done, and at once. I should never forgive myself if Noel came to harm by serving that miserable cur, and I could have stopped it."

At this moment he was alone with the regent and de Torcy, the earl having gone back to the bedroom with Vidal. Gwynett decided to acquaint his companions with his news.

"Monseigneur," he said, "will you and M. de Torcy do me the favor to read this letter?"

The regent cast his eye over the paper, and passed it on to de Torcy.

"What about it, chevalier?" he asked.

"Monseigneur, you know that as a rule I do not care to ask things for myself. But I do not feel that I am justified in not asking for a friend—especially if that friend is possibly placed in a false position through my instrumentality. I should like, with your permission, to seek lord Stair's good offices in case things go wrong with the young fellow who is mentioned in that letter."

"By all means. What is it you desire?"

At this juncture lord Stair re-entered the room with offers of hospitality to his three guests.

"Milord," remarked the regent, "you were talking just now of your obligations to M. de Starhemberg. I think he can tell you how to repay him—in part, at least—if you ask him."

"Anything in the world!" cried the earl. "Speak, my dear chevalier—what can I possibly do for you?"

"If you will be good enough to glance at this letter, milord, I will explain."

The earl took the letter, read it carefully, and asked,

"How am I concerned in this, chevalier? Is it the case that you happen to be a sympathizer with the Pretender?"

"Exactly the contrary, milord. So much so that I intend to set out at once for Scotland and endeavor to detach Mr. Wray from the Stuart cause. I am under the impression that I shall have no difficulty in doing so, if I can only find him."

"And how can I help you, chevalier?"

"By giving me two pieces of paper, milord—a safe-conduct for myself in all parts of King George's dominions, and another for Noel Wray. I will take my chance of being shot as a spy by the Jacobites, but I wish to secure Wray against being hanged as a rebel by the royal forces."

"Certainly I will furnish you with the documents, chevalier. Is that all?"

"There is one other matter, milord, in which you might perhaps be able to exert some influence, if you were disposed—and, by so doing, further the ends of justice."

"Name it, chevalier."

"Milord, it is to obtain a free pardon from the crown for a British subject who was convicted of felony nearly four years ago, and who to my certain knowledge was absolutely innocent of the crime imputed to him."

"What was the crime?"

"He was convicted of murder, milord, and sentenced to death."

"The sentence was commuted, I suppose?"

"No, milord."

"Then how did he escape hanging?"

"He did not escape."

"Not escape? was he hanged, then?"

"Yes, milord."

"But if so, what is the use of a pardon?"

"It may save him from being hanged twice over, milord."

"Hanged twice, chevalier? what do you mean?"

"His sentence is still in force, milord. The man I speak of came to life again after his execution, and fled abroad for safety."

"It seems incredible. Are you sure of what you say, chevalier? Who was the man?"

Gwynett paused in momentary indecision, and then, de-

ciding in favor of a complete confidence in the earl, replied,

"Milord, it was I."

"Good God! you?"

"I, milord. My name is Ambrose Gwynett, of Thornhaugh, and I was hanged for a crime which, to the best of my belief, was never committed at all. Perhaps I may add that my story is fully known to monseigneur here and to M. de Torcy."

The earl looked from Gwynett to his other two companions with the greatest surprise, and the regent hastened to say,

"Milord, you may place implicit confidence in the chevalier's statement. My own acquaintance with the facts of the case would have led me, at an early date, to make personal representations to you in favor of a reconsideration of the sentence passed upon M. Ambrose Gwynett, had not this particular opportunity chanced to present itself."

"What I should promptly have done for yourself, monseigneur, I need not say shall be done still more promptly for Mr. Gwynett. I will at once communicate with his majesty's government on the subject, and make it a personal matter. In the meantime, I trust it will only be necessary for Mr. Gwynett to take every care of the safe-conduct I shall give him, and to demand a reference to me should any difficulty arise through its loss."

"That will be quite sufficient, milord," replied Gwynett. "For the rest, I take my chance."

"So you are quite decided, chevalier?" asked the regent regretfully.

"Necessity decides for me, monseigneur."

"Well, I shall really give you up this time. The pitcher cannot go to the well forever—eh, marquis?"

"It seems to me, monseigneur, that the pitcher can go to bed, and the sooner the better. What do you say, chevalier?"

Gwynett still felt very much exhausted, and accepted the offer of a bed placed at his disposal by lord Stair, after which the regent went away with M. de Torcy. The countess still slept peacefully, and the baby followed her example.

The next day Gwynett took leave of M. d'Orléans and his other acquaintances in Paris, with the exception of madame de Valincour, who pleaded indisposition when he called at her hôtel. He had previously asked Dr. Vidal, who was now installed at the Palais-Royal, to examine the boy Justin, little Charlot's companion, and let him know his opinion of his ailment. The doctor's verdict was that the case was practically hopeless, the spine being incurably diseased.

In the afternoon Gwynett, duly furnished with the safe-conducts promised by lord Stair, set off for Calais, whence he intended to take sail for the coast of Fife.

BOOK III

THE “ROYAL MARY”

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CHAPTER XXVII.

VISITORS AT HOLYWELL.

BY the time the Pretender, travelling *via* Dunkerque, had arrived at Peterhead on December 22nd, 1715, the Stuart cause was already lost. At the battles of Preston and Sheriffmuir his adherents had been utterly routed, and the surviving Jacobite forces in Scotland owed their security from molestation more to the snow and the impassable roads than the generalship of their leaders. The loss at St. Malo of the twenty-seven thousand louis d'or of M. de Vaudémont had been followed by the wreck of the ship carrying the hundred thousand crowns in gold sent by the king of Spain, and the Pretender was thus left without any war-chest. After a couple of months' inaction, he deserted his army and set sail on February 4th, 1716, accompanied by lord Melfort and a few other supporters, for the continent. He arrived at Gravelines a week later, and went to take up his temporary residence in the neighborhood of Paris.

Those of his followers who had fallen into the hands of the British forces came off more or less badly. Many were hanged or shot, and hundreds were sold into virtual slavery on the American plantations. Of the seven Jacobite peers who were taken prisoners, lords Kenmure and Derwentwater were executed on February 24th, lord Nithsdale escaped the previous night by exchanging clothes with his wife (who came ostensibly to visit him and remained behind in his cell), lord Winton broke prison by filing through the bars of his window in the Tower, and

lords Widdrington, Nairne, and Carnwath were pardoned. In the meantime the royalist forces continued to hunt down batches of Jacobite fugitives all over the country, and a commission for trying rebels of a rank inferior to the peers already specified met in the Court of Common Pleas in April.

The duke of Marlborough, although nominally commander-in-chief, had taken no part at all in the military suppression of the rising, and had been living in semi-retirement at Holywell, his country house near St. Albans. He was still there when, on May 28th, he entertained at luncheon a visitor who had arrived from France the previous day, and who had travelled with a good deal of secrecy under an assumed name. The visitor was his nephew the duke of Berwick, son of James II. and Arabella Churchill, and consequently half-brother to the Pretender.

At the conclusion of the meal, which passed without any reference to the object of the marshal's visit, the duke led his guest out upon the terrace, where the sun shone brilliantly and the air was as warm as in early summer.

"Now that we are quite secure from eaves-droppers, my dear uncle," began the marshal, "I will get to my business without delay. I have just come from Chalons."

"From Chalons?"

"Yes. The chevalier's *incognito* at the house in the Bois de Boulogne was altogether too carelessly maintained, and the regent was obliged to make representations. The chevalier therefore moved on to Chalons. But there a new obstacle presented itself. M. le duc de Lorraine raised difficulties about a return to Bar-le-duc."

"Does he refuse his consent?"

"Not in so many words. But he has written to say that, in view of his relations with the British government, he advises the chevalier to seek an asylum from Charles XII. in Rhenish Bavaria, at Zweibrücken. Should the king of Sweden refuse, he suggests that he may then take a return to Bar-le-duc into consideration. The chevalier is very much disappointed, declines altogether to go to Zweibrücken, and is now talking of meeting his supporters at Avignon."

"Avignon?" echoed the duke, in some surprise. "That is a clever way of conciliating the English Protestant party." *

The marshal shrugged his shoulders.

"I think it is partly because Mar and Ormonde have been obliged to take refuge there," he replied.

"You must agree with me, marshal, that those two men are utterly incapable."

"It seems so. We have been decidedly unlucky in our leading men since Hamilton's death."

The duke waved his hand impatiently.

"Hamilton would have helped you no better," he said. "What does Bolingbroke say about the Avignon scheme?"

"Unfortunately there is no longer any question of Bolingbroke—another *bêtise*."

"I have not heard of that."

"So far as I can learn, the chevalier without a word of warning sent Bolingbroke a curt dismissal from his post of secretary of state, together with an order to hand over all his papers to Ormonde as his successor. This was about a month ago. Bolingbroke is furious, and has sworn to the queen† that his hand shall rot off before he ever uses pen or sword for the chevalier again."

The duke's face assumed an expression of extreme disgust.

"Of course," he remarked. "He was the best man you had. In fact, the only man—that is to say, from England. But between ourselves, my dear nephew, it is all of a piece. Things have been botched from beginning to end."

"You are quite right," replied the marshal, in a depressed tone, "and it is very discouraging. It seems really impossible to get the chevalier to place the most ordinary confidence in his friends, and we hear of blunders only when it is too late to remedy them. I give you my word that the first hint Bolingbroke and I had of Mar's rising was from Braemar."

"I can quite believe it. All this is one of the reasons why I myself have, very reluctantly, held aloof in the matter."

* Avignon and its surrounding county was at this time a Papal possession and a center of Papal influence.

† The Widow of James II.

The marshal nodded, and looked at the duke rather seriously.

"It is about that that I wished to have a few words with you," he said.

"I am quite at your service," replied the duke.

"I may speak freely?"

"Why not?"

"I do not forget, my dear uncle, that you are commander-in-chief."

"Gad! I am not often reminded of the circumstance," replied the duke, who had found himself very much on the shelf since the Hanoverian accession. "Let us hear what you have to say, marshal."

"Well, as a matter of fact, my dear uncle, I am strongly of opinion that Avignon for the chevalier will be simply extinction."

"I agree with you there."

"On the other hand, our—or rather, his—recent failure has been so deplorable as to make it almost hopeless to think of any other active steps at present. But in any case, I for one feel it to be imperative to learn precisely your own sentiments and intentions in the matter. I freely admit that there has been very little inducement of late for you to stand forth on our behalf."

"Permit me to say, marshal, that I do not need inducements. But it serves neither you nor me nor the chevalier to run one's head against a brick wall in the dark. I heard of Mar's rising only when it was begun. I heard of the chevalier's journey only when it was ended. Had I been consulted—which I was not—I should, in the interests of the chevalier, have protested against both steps. Had my assistance been asked—which was not the case—I should have refused it, and in both cases for the same reason."

"What reason, duke?"

"Why, for the reason that revolutions—successful revolutions, that is—are not made that way. You may have a hundred ways of raising a revolt, but there is only one way of making a revolution."

"But you will admit it was necessary, sooner or later, to do something."

"To do something, yes. But against the government, no."

"What then?"

"What then? My dear marshal, did 1688 teach us nothing? Did William of Orange succeed by acting against the government? A thousand times, no. Against the king, if you like. But *with* the government, with ministers, with the army, with the houses of parliament. Secure adherents all over the country, and you secure nothing. Have a controlling party amongst those who hold the reins of power, and you have everything. Risings in the west, in the north, in Scotland—a dozen of these are not worth one vote of a majority in the privy council."

"Then you think the chevalier has destroyed every chance for himself?"

"Not at all. It is still in his favor that his party was defeated at Preston and Sheriffmuir."

"In his favor?" echoed the astonished marshal.

"Good Lord! yes. Do you suppose that a couple of victories over British troops would have endeared the victor to the British public? William of Orange managed better than that in 1688. He knew that a victory over English forces would be fatal, and therefore he took care never to have a battle."

"But, my dear uncle, I do not see the chevalier's chance in all this. What can he do?"

"I should recommend him, for one thing, to do what he is told—and for another, to be told by the proper persons. Let us say you and myself, by way of a change."

"Then you think something is possible?"

"Many things are possible. If—mind, I only say if—king George were to die suddenly, and if the prince of Wales were in some way on the shelf, and if the chevalier happened to be in London, and were proclaimed king on the instant—in such a case I do not see why he should not go comfortably to St. James's, and stay there."

The marshal looked rather disappointed.

"But there is not the slightest probability of anything of the sort," he replied.

"You think so?" asked the duke negligently. "Well, of course you know best."

"But, my dear uncle——"

"But, my dear nephew, what is the use of history if one never recollects it? One would think you had never heard of your ancestor Henri IV., who in his day was just as obnoxious to the Catholics as king George is now. Times are changed, no doubt, or else Catholics are become too easy-going for a second Ravallac to be bred amongst them."

"*Pardieu!* do you think, then, that king George runs any risk of assassination?"

"I hope not—at least not on political or religious grounds. That is almost the only thing that would make the dynasty popular."

"But if you are not referring to a violent death, do you consider the king's health precarious?"

"I take it he is as healthy as most people—perhaps more so, on account of his stupidity."

The marshal looked at the duke for some seconds in a puzzled way, and finally remarked,

"I really fail to catch your meaning, duke."

"So it seems. But the whole thing is quite simple. Let us take things in order. To begin with—king George, and his household, and his family, and his mistresses, are all detested. I daresay the three first might be tolerated if it were not for the last. But our people cannot stand their kings having ugly mistresses."

"That is what we hear, certainly."

"Secondly, as the chevalier has not annoyed the English by gaining victories over them, he is himself not at all unpopular."

"If that is a point in his favor, all the better."

"Thirdly, king George used to be rather popular over in his native country. But now the folks there are left without their God-given ruler, and there is consequently a great deal of dissatisfaction among the Hanoverians."

"I was not aware of that."

"Yes. Finally, as I daresay you know, the king and the prince of Wales hate each other like poison."

"So they say."

"Well, as a natural consequence of the king being out of favor in Hanover, the prince of Wales is quite anxious

to go over there and make himself popular—just to spite his father."

"I do not see how that is to help us."

"Wait a little. It also happens, as you already know, that because the king rests entirely upon the Whig party, the prince of Wales makes a point of having his little court composed almost entirely of Jacobites. In fact, I think that five out of six of the chief officers of his household are openly of the party of the chevalier. Does all this suggest nothing to you?"

"Not so long as king George is alive."

The duke looked leisurely over the park, and helped himself to snuff.

"I daresay, marshal," he remarked, "you have never visited our Bedlam hospital for madmen, at Moorfields?" *

"No," replied the wondering marshal.

"I was there the other day, as one of the governors. One of the inmates is a Dutchman, who has been there nearly twenty years, and whose insanity had originally taken the form of violently and continuously threatening the life of William III. because he had abandoned the United Provinces to become king of England. It has occurred to me that it would be curious if some Hanoverian had the same idea—and carried it out."

"It is very unlikely."

"Very. Almost as unlikely as that some modern Ravail-lac, wishing to get king George out of his way without compromising either the Jacobites or the Roman Catholics, should pretend to be a mad Hanoverian and kill the king for his absenteeism. But you see, if such an improbable thing did occur, nobody would think of blaming the chevalier."

The marshal thought over this suggestion for some minutes in silence.

"The idea of assassination is very repugnant to me," he remarked finally.

"Naturally," replied the duke, handing his snuff-box. "It would be much more satisfactory to shoot, bayonet, or blow up in a battle ten thousand miserable devils who

* Removed to St. George's Fields in 1814.

have nothing to do with the matter, and who don't know either the king or the chevalier from Adam."

The marshal shrugged his shoulders.

"War is war," he remarked. "In this case, I do not see that we should gain anything by having George II. in place of George I.—in spite of his Jacobite household."

"Nothing at all."

"Then why——?"

"My dear marshal, did I say a word about George II.? Let us keep to business. Suppose that the prince of Wales carries out his intention of going to Hanover, and that while he is at Osnabrück, or travelling thither, the throne becomes vacant. That circumstance might suggest a good many ideas to his Jacobite suite."

"For example?"

"Well, they might withhold the news from him, or keep him drunk for a fortnight, while a proclamation in his name was forwarded for publication in England."

"To announce his accession?"

"Just the reverse. To state that in order to meet the urgent wishes of his beloved countrymen he intended to waive his rights to the English crown, and remain simply elector of Hanover."

"But that would be at once contradicted," objected the marshal.

"By whom? Your friends in the prince's household? If they could not prevent that, they had better go back to the nursery."

"That is certainly true."

"London could in the meantime have been filled with rumors that the prince of Wales did not intend to return to England—so that the proclamation would not come upon people as a surprise."

"And as to the chevalier?"

"Of course, I am assuming that he would be already *incognito* in London. Then, on receipt of the announcement of the prince of Wales's abdication, the chevalier's friends in parliament and in the privy council would at once proclaim him king, and carry matters with a rush. In such a case, the commander-in-chief would naturally hold himself at the disposal of the sovereign *de facto*."

The marshal pondered deeply over the string of contingencies suggested to him, and finally remarked,

"I must think over the scheme. Certainly it is a daring one."

"Daring for the mad Hanoverian," replied the duke. "But hardly for anybody else. Someone would of course have to speak German fluently."

"Father Innis was brought up at Heidelberg," said the marshal, half to himself. "And he is half mad already."

The duke helped himself to snuff again.

"I presume," he remarked, "that if any Hanoverian came over here to get an audience of his majesty, in order to present a petition for the king's return, it would be quite natural for him to ask my good offices—especially if he introduced himself as one of my old soldiers. People would hardly expect me to recollect the face of every private I have ever commanded. But all these are details. I take it the chevalier has little or no money left?"

"Very little. Of course the queen helps him."

"So far as I am concerned, marshal, I should not feel very much disposed to place funds in his own hands. But if anything had to be done, you yourself could have ten or fifteen thousand pounds whenever you liked—more if necessary."

"Many thanks, my dear uncle. I will turn the matter over in my mind, and give you my answer."

"When you please, marshal. I think I must get back to my study now. There are usually half a dozen people waiting to see me at this time about something or other, in spite of the distance from town."

"Do not let me detain you. I will stroll round the gardens, and see you later."

The duke went indoors, and entered his study, which was a large room at the end of a long corridor, and rather shut off from the rest of the house. Mr. Cardonnel, his secretary, was sitting at a desk on a side table, and rose as the duke entered.

"A gentleman has been asking to see you," remarked the secretary. "I did not like to interrupt you and the marshal, and desired him to wait."

"I can see him now. I suppose it is the usual thing—a commission for one of his sons, eh?"

"He did not say," replied Cardonnel.

"Who is it?" asked the duke, seating himself at his own table.

"He gave the name of Richard. Shall you want me?"

"Not at present, Cardonnel. Show Mr. Richard in."

Cardonnel retired, and presently returned to usher in a tall man, whose hair and beetling brows were black, and whose nose was curved like the beak of an eagle. He remained at the door until Cardonnel had withdrawn. Then he quickly turned the key in the lock, and faced the duke.

The latter rose from his seat.

"What are you about, sir?" he demanded sharply. "Who are you?"

"My lord," replied the visitor, coming forward, "I have locked the door in order that we may not be disturbed. My name is Randolph Dorrington, and I once passed under the name of Richard Collins. I do not know whether those names suggest any reminiscences to you."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"VENGEANCE IS MINE."

THE duke's face did not flinch as he met Dorrington's fixed gaze. But a quick tightening of the lips told the visitor that his blow had struck home. For a second or two there was perfect silence, and then the duke replied, in an uncompromising tone,

"Sir, I know nothing of you or your various names. If you have any business with me, be good enough to state it."

"My lord, that will not take very long. As it appears your memory does not serve you quite as well as one might expect, I will venture to refresh it. In May, 1694, my friend captain Floyd was the bearer of a packet from colonel Sackville to king James at St. Germain."

"Very possibly, sir."

"Captain Floyd, as you are aware, being prevented by sudden illness from delivering the packet, accepted my offer to be his deputy, and I duly handed the packet over to lord Melfort. The same night I was put in the Bastille, and I remained there, apparently forgotten, until December, 1711. No reason was assigned for my arrest, and I could guess at none. At last I had an opportunity of escaping. Then I learned why I had been buried alive for seventeen years. It appeared that the packet I carried contained a letter of yours, warning king James of the intended expedition under general Talmash against Brest, and that I—known to be a close friend of the general's—was suspected of having opened the letter on the way. In your interest, and with your concurrence, it was therefore determined to suppress me."

"I do not know, sir, who your informant was," replied the duke, still more coldly than before. "But I need scarcely say that, as far as I am concerned, this is all pure invention."

"On the contrary, my lord, the letter was yours, and it was written with the double object of betraying your master, king William, and of destroying your rival Talmash."

The duke shrugged his shoulders.

"After having invented your letter, sir," he replied, "it is of course not difficult for you to invent your explanation of it. One is as imaginary as the other."

"Talmash, my lord, was my foster-brother, my dearest and closest friend. As for you, he was in your way, and you hated him."

"A piece of malignant gossip."

Dorrington waved his hand contemptuously.

"I returned to England, my lord," he went on, "to find that my wife had died of a broken heart, leaving a child who was born after my arrest. Within a few hours of my landing, I was pressed on board one of the queen's ships, and carried off to South America. I have only just now been able to return—hence the delay in waiting upon you. In the meantime I learn that my daughter, bereft of reason, disappeared four years ago, and all trace of her is lost."

"I fail to see, sir, how I am concerned in these regrettable occurrences."

"My lord, you are concerned so far, that I am alone in the world, without a single tie of family or friendship, with nothing to stand between me and my duty—the duty which brings me here to-day."

"I am not yet much the wiser, sir."

"Have you not guessed, my lord, what that duty is?"

"Not in the least, sir—nor have I any curiosity on the subject."

"Then I will tell you. It is to do justice on a traitor and a murderer."

"And who may that be?"

"Yourself."

"I am interested to hear that."

"Yes, John Churchill. You, assassin of Talmash—you, triple perjurer—you, betrayer of every master to whom you have sworn allegiance! But do not mistake me. It is not to avenge my own wrongs that I am here. For myself, I pardon them all. I pardon you my seven-

teen years of the Bastille, my exile, my solitude, my misery and despair. I pardon you my dead wife, my desolate home, the lonely old age which lies before me. But for the treachery which sent Talmash to his death, you shall pay to the uttermost farthing—a life for a life!"

"Do you threaten me, sir?"

"Threaten? No. I judge—I condemn—I execute. If you think you can make your peace with Heaven, make it—for your hour is come."

The duke hesitated, and then decided upon a last attempt to temporize.

"I presume, sir," he said, "that as you seem to be in earnest, you are at the same time out of your senses. Otherwise, it would be quite easy to show you that the letter, upon which you base all your ridiculous charges, never had any existence."

Dorrington looked gloomily at the duke for a moment or two.

"It is in my pocket," he replied curtly.

A faint flush passed over the duke's impassive face, and a gleam of deadly hatred came into his eyes. Dorrington smiled bitterly.

"Unfortunately for what passes in your mind, my lord, the pocket which contains the letter is not here. I deposited it in London, having arranged that should I not return to-day to claim it, twenty thousand copies of it shall be printed and distributed through the town to-morrow morning. If I return—after killing you—it shall be destroyed. Naturally I hope the latter event will happen."

The duke set his teeth together.

"A truce to bravado, sir," he said hoarsely. "If you have anything more to say, say it, and let us finish the matter."

The walls of the duke's study were decorated with a large number of weapons, arranged in artistic groups, and amongst them were rapiers and daggers of various periods. Dorrington put his hand on the sword-hilt, and pointed to the walls in silence. The duke shrugged his shoulders, and made a rapid movement towards the bell-rope. Dorrington instantly drew a pistol, and levelled it.

"Stop!" he cried peremptorily. "Ring, or call for assistance, and I fire."

The duke stopped and faced his antagonist with the courage which had never in his life deserted him.

"If you came here, sir," he said, "to butcher an unarmed man, you could have saved time by doing it when you first entered the room."

Dorrington again pointed to the walls.

"You have plenty of weapons there. Take one, second Iscariot, and defend your worthless life."

The duke looked at the speaker without stirring. Dorington smiled again.

"Reassure yourself, my lord," he said. "As my name is not John Churchill, I shall not stab you in the back while you are choosing your sword."

The duke's face paled with ungovernable rage, and he replied in a trembling voice,

"Sir, insults do not become a man who, in the prime of life, forces a duel upon his senior by twenty years."

"My lord, thanks to you I have been nearly twenty years without handling a sword. That goes to equalize matters."

The duke turned without speaking, and selected a rapier from a group over the fire-place. There was a space in front of the two side windows in which the combatants could take their stand without requiring to move any of the furniture of the room. Dorington stepped to one end of this space, drew his sword, and rested the point on the ground. The duke came from the fire-place with the weapon he had chosen, and took his place opposite Dorington.

"Are you ready, sir?" he said.

"Quite ready."

"Then guard, sir."

The two men advanced, and the swords crossed.

Half a dozen passes were exchanged without result, and the combatants disengaged. Then the weapons came together again.

For a moment the two men remained motionless. Then Dorington, watching the face of his adversary, noticed a sudden and awful change come over it. The pressure of the duke's blade relaxed, the hilt slipped from his



grasp, and as his body arched backward in a violent convulsion he sank to the ground, and rolled over on his face.

Dorrington bent forward, astonished and almost terror-stricken.

"It is a fit of falling-sickness," he said to himself.

He came nearer, and turned over the prostrate body with his foot. The duke's face was twisted in a frightful contortion, and his wide-open eyes glared hideously upon his enemy.

Dorrington recognized, with a pang of the bitterest disappointment, that his long-yearned-for vengeance had escaped him, and probably forever. He turned away, picked up the duke's sword, and replaced it over the mantel-shelf. Then he sheathed his own blade, unlocked the door and pulled the bell-rope.

The summons was answered by Cardonnel, who looked surprised at not seeing the duke. Dorrington pointed to the floor at his feet.

"His grace has, I fear, had some kind of seizure," he said. "Have you a doctor near?"

Cardonnel came forward hastily, and knelt down by the duke's side.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated, "this is shocking. Who could have expected such a thing?"

"Can I be of any assistance?" inquired Dorrington, taking up his hat as Cardonnel unloosed the duke's cravat.

"If you will be so good as to inform the duchess—you will find her in the hall as you pass out of the corridor. If not, please send any servant whom you may meet."

Dorrington went out, and found the duchess in the hall. She was talking to a soldierly-looking man whom Dorrington, from having often seen him earlier in life, recognized as the duke of Berwick.

"Madam," said Dorrington, answering the duchess's quick and penetrating glance, "Mr. Cardonnel asks me to tell you that his grace, while according me the honor of an interview, has been taken suddenly ill. He is with him now, in his study."

The duchess turned hastily to the marshal, and said, "You will excuse me, Mr. James?"

The marshal bowed gravely, and the duchess disappeared down the corridor.

"Is this attack serious, sir?" asked the marshal, with his marked French accent.

"M. le maréchal," replied Dorrington in French, looking the other straight in the face, "I guess your errand here. It is useless. His grace's treasons are ended."

He bowed, passed through the hall, and went away.

* * * * *

By the evening the duke's seizure was known in London, and the news was on its way to every capital in Europe. It was at once conjectured—and as it turned out, correctly—that the duke's career as a public man was virtually closed.

On the third day after the attack an express from London brought the news to M. de Torcy in Paris, together with a letter from Dorrington, giving the details known only to himself and mentioning the presence, *incognito*, of the duke of Berwick.

The marquis half-uttered an exclamation of astonishment at his first sight of the signature, and then suddenly recollected that Lavalaye (who was with him) knew nothing of Dorrington's connection with the affair at the "Crown and Anchor."

"This comes luckily for M. Gwynett," he said to himself. "I must tell monseigneur and milord Stair that the direct proof of his innocence is at last forthcoming. And I ought to write, too, to the old uncle at Munich. It is only a pity that M. Dorrington did not turn up six months ago."

He handed the letter to Lavalaye, and remarked,

"That letter of madame de Melfort's has been a long time on its journey. It is curious that it should reach its destination just as the duke seemed to be arranging a second Brest treason with M. de Berwick—still more curious if it led to this seizure. I told you when we sent it, René, that it might alter history a little."

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT THE "THREE TUNS."

THE "Three Tuns" was a roomy and prosperous tavern at Plymouth, reputable enough to be a good deal frequented by the officers of the king's ships, and not so exclusive as to prevent its being a resort of the captains and master-mariners of humbler craft sailing the waters of the Channel. It had a large coffee-room and a couple of parlors, opening out of it, which were mostly used for the transaction of private business by the visitors to the tavern.

One forenoon, nearly a week after Dorrington's visit to Holywell, the smaller of the two parlors was occupied by a gentleman who had been writing a letter, and at whose elbow stood a bottle of brandy and a glass. His pipe had gone out during the inditing of his epistle, and he relit it while glancing over the pages preparatory to folding and sealing them. The letter ran:

"MY DEAR YVONNE,

"As you have probably heard little or nothing of me since I left Paris, this is to give you a brief account of my proceedings so far.

"First, as to the affair of M. de Vaudémont's money, I will only say now that it missed fire in a most exasperating way—so much so indeed that it fills me with disgust even to think about it, and I will therefore reserve details till we meet.

"The chevalier, as you probably know, was after all afraid to sail from St. Malo, and I accompanied him on horseback across the country to Dunkerque, whence we embarked for Peterhead in the *Royal Mary*.

"I need not say that our voyage was quite useless, and we might all just as well have stopped at home. If the Jacobite party ever had a chance, which I doubt, it was

certainly gone long before we arrived in Scotland, and the only utility of the affair for me lay in the chance of selling the chevalier to the British government. I had managed to set the matter going in a very promising way, when just at the wrong moment the chevalier spoiled everything by taking flight. It placed me in a very awkward position, as the English ruffians accused me of betraying them instead of the chevalier, and talked of hanging me. But I was able to smooth matters over to a certain extent by putting into the hands of the duke of Argyle (the English commander-in-chief), the largest party of the chevalier's deserted followers. This was a detachment which set out to cross the country between Montrose and the Clyde, and their capture through my instrumentality put me back into favor again.

"I write this from Plymouth, having arrived here three days ago in the same ship which brought all the English prisoners who were captured near Glasgow. They will be conveyed to London for trial in some other ship, as ours grounded on entering the harbor, and will have to lay up for repairs.

"I have employed the time since my arrival here in exploring the Dorrington headquarters, with a little friendly assistance from the authorities. It is very curious that nothing has turned up about mistress Dorrington. No one seems to know anything about her. The rents are received by the family lawyers in this town, who appear to be acting for the London lawyers of squire Wray, of Wray Manor, and they either can or will say nothing. All that I could learn was that the long-missing father had been reported to have been seen abroad, in South America. But this is probably only a *canard*.

"My plans at present are to go to Kent, most likely by sea, to make inquiries at Wray, and if nothing transpires there, to return to Paris without delay.

"Your loving brother, ARMAND."

"P.S.—I have called myself de Beauval, simply, since leaving Lorraine."

Having looked over his letter, the abbé folded it, and rang the table-bell for wax. A waiter came, took the

order and went away, leaving the door open. The abbé, looking through the doorway into the coffee-room beyond, noticed two men sitting at a side-table while they shared a bottle of claret between them. The face of one of them seemed familiar to him, and when after a moment's silence this person spoke to his companion, the abbé started in his chair and leaned forward eagerly. Then he shrank back, and pulled his hat over his eyes.

"*Sangdieu!*" he muttered, "it is that meddler at Wray Cottage—the man that was seized by the press-gang. To think of his turning up again!"

This *rencontre* gave the abbé a good deal of uneasiness. Ambrose Gwynett's companion could hardly have returned to England without learning how his capture by the press-gang had been turned to account, and if he should happen to recognize Gaultier as his fellow-visitor to the "Crown and Anchor," the abbé stood a chance of experiencing a very bad quarter of an hour. He kept quiet and held his letter up before his face till the waiter returned. Just at this moment the two men finished their wine, rose, and left the coffee-room.

The abbé heaved a sigh of relief, and turned to light the wax at the taper which had been placed on the table before him.

"Waiter," he asked, "do you happen to know either of the two gentlemen who were in the coffee-room just now?"

"Yes, sir. The shorter of the two is Mr. Coverdale—he has the contract for horsing the mail-service between here and London, sir. Great man for horseflesh, sir."

"And the other?"

"The other is squire Dorrington, sir."

The abbé looked at the speaker for a second or two in perfect stupefaction.

"Dorrington?" he finally stammered. "What Dorrington?"

"Dorrington Hall, sir, near Halcombe. Very strange case, sir. The gentleman was away from home more than twenty years—everybody thought he was dead and buried. But last night he came down here, travelling with Mr. Coverdale, and has been to his lawyers here to prove his

identity and see after his property at Dorrington. The story's all over the town, sir."

The abbé turned over this astonishing news in his mind, with the wax held idly between his fingers.

"What has kept him away, then?" he asked, by way of saying something.

"Well, sir, they say he was a prisoner in France for a long time—then he got free, and came over to England. But before he reached home, he was nabbed by a press-gang and taken on a three years' voyage."

"Why didn't he write home?"

"As far as I understand it, sir, there was some adventure, about a whole boat's crew, with him amongst them, being lost in a fog, and having to maroon—so they call it—on some uninhabited island for a couple of years. They were given up as lost by the ship they belonged to—the *Mermaid*, king's ship, sir. Then they got picked off by a passing Dutchman, had a long voyage in her, and were landed in Holland only two or three weeks back.

"The *Mermaid*?" repeated the abbé, picking the word out of the stream of the waiter's gossip. "There is a *Mermaid* in port now—came in this morning. So one of the coast-guards told me an hour ago."

"Indeed, sir? I heard a salute, but didn't know what ship had come in. Curious, that, sir?"

"Yes. But, of course, it may not be the same vessel. The name is not uncommon."

"Very true, sir. Shall I put your letter in the post, sir?"

"No. I may have to add a postscript. You can see how much longer they are going to be about my dinner."

The waiter went off, and the abbé was left to ruminate over the new position of matters.

"This is the very deuce," he said to himself. "A father-in-law was the last thing I bargained for—and this man, of all men in the world! So Muriel Dorrington is no longer an orphan—not that that would matter much, if it was worth while making her one again. But before she can be won she has to be found, and this damnable father will naturally find her first if she is to be found at all. Then they will compare notes, and I am done for."

Certainly I am the most unfortunate devil on the face of the earth."

While the abbé was deploring his ill-fortune, the waiter reappeared and inquired whether the gentleman would be served in the parlor or in the coffee-room.

"This room will do very well," replied the abbé. "What has become of your Mr. Coverdale and his friend the squire?"

"Just started in a post-chaise for Dorrington Hall, sir, and the lawyer with them."

"All the better," said the abbé to himself. "On second thoughts," he remarked aloud, "this parlor is a little stuffy. I will dine in the large room."

"Very good, sir."

The abbé's meal was duly served in the coffee-room, and he disposed of it to the accompaniment of much anxious cogitation respecting his next move. His search for a judicious programme was unavailing, and he finally decided to keep within reach of Dorrington Hall until something should occur as a guide to his future line of action.

Presently a party of fresh arrivals entered the coffee-room, and filled a couple of tables at the other side of the room. Some of the newcomers were evidently townsmen, but the rest were naval petty officers and midshipmen. Wine was set before them, and conversation set in with great hilarity. The waiter came over to Gaultier.

"You were quite right, sir," he said. "It is a pity squire Dorrington didn't wait a bit. The ship is the *Mermaid*, sir—come home to pay off after a four years' cruise round the Brazils, the East Indies, and the plantations. Very curious coincidence, sir, isn't it? These are some of the young gentlemen from the ship, sir."

"I daresay they are glad to get ashore," remarked the abbé, with a glance across the room at the middies, who were drinking healths with great vigor and a ceaseless accompaniment of chatter.

"No wonder, sir. Dry land is dry land, after all. Yes, sir—coming, sir."

This was in reply to a summons from one of the midshipmen to produce a fresh magnum of port. The bottle was brought, and the midshipman, rising in his seat, was cheered with vinous enthusiasm by his companions.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have a toast to propose, for which you will all please charge. Our fair passengers, gentlemen!"

This suggestion was received with vociferous applause by the speaker's fellow-officers, and one of their townsman friends remarked,

"With all my heart—but who are they?"

"Who are they?" repeated the middy, laughing. "Well, first of all, there is the admirable and time-honored madam Rostherne."

At this name, the abbé's glass fell from his fingers to the floor, and was shattered into a score of fragments. He stared open-mouthed as the speaker went on,

"Next, the charming and vivacious mistress Avice Wray. And last, but truly first, the peerless mistress Muriel Dorrington! Bumpers, gentlemen, and no heel-taps!"

The abbé, scarcely able to believe his ears, gazed vacantly at the revellers while the toast was drunk with cheers and laughter, and even the pot-boys looked in with grinning faces at the doorway. Then, with an effort, he regained his composure, and signed to the head-waiter for a fresh glass.

"A libation to Fortuna," he said to himself. "This is truly a day of surprises. The luck hasn't deserted me after all."

The midshipman's words could only mean that the three ladies named had obtained passages in the *Mermaid* on her return voyage from the North American colonies—then usually styled the Plantations. Whether they were still on board, or, if not, whither they had betaken themselves, remained to be learned. But it seemed to the abbé that the surprising news was a thing to be turned to account at all hazards. He took up his hat and cloak, and rose to leave the coffee-room in search of the desired information.

Passing the open door of the second parlor, he was again surprised to see captain Kermode and three of his half-brothers just taking their seats round the table, while a fifth man, in naval uniform, was standing near the door giving an order to the waiter.

"*Diable!*" said the abbé to himself, "this hospitable 'Three Tuns' seems to be a rendezvous for all the world. I wonder what brings that crew here? It is a little cool for

a man who is three-quarters smuggler, and the rest Jacobite, to be hob-nobbing with a king's officer."

He nodded to the captain, whom he had not seen since the *Royal Mary* conveyed the chevalier and himself to Peterhead, and went out of the coffee-room.

At the door he was met face to face by Matt Kermode, who was entering to join the rest of his family in the parlor. An amusing reminiscence of their last meeting on the beach near Deal, some four years previously, came into the abbé's mind, and he smiled grimly as Matt touched his fore-lock.

"Good-day, M. Matthew Kermode," he said. "It is a long while since we have seen each other. How was it you were not with the rest of your people on the *Royal Mary* last December?"

"Your honor, I was looking after our lugger between Calais and Sandwich just then."

"Ah! And how have you fared since we arranged that little suicide of yours at Deal? I duly delivered the farewell letter we wrote to your beloved wife, as no doubt you know—was she inconsolable at your loss?"

"She went on awful for a time, your honor—leastways so my brothers heard. For myself, I never went within twenty miles of the 'Crown and Anchor' till she'd left it."

"She is not there now, then?"

"No, your honor. After she heard I'd drowned myself, her tongue got worse than ever—if it could get worse—and it clean frightened all the business away. About a twelve-month afterwards she cleared out, and no one has seen her since. The neighbors reckoned she went back to her folks in Yorkshire."

"Let us trust she has gone to await you in Paradise, my dear M. Kermode."

Matt looked rather dubious at this prospect.

"Well, your honor," he remarked, "I don't wish her any harm. But if she makes *that* port, I reckon I'll have to cruise about outside. The same moorings won't hold us both, neither here nor anywhere else."

"Happily there is another alternative for her," suggested the abbé genially.

"I guess not, your honor," replied Matt, with a despond-

ent shake of the head. "Old Nick will never have her—never!"

"*Parbleu!*" said the abbé, as he turned to leave the inn, "you are evidently a confirmed pessimist, my good friend. Your system of theology is the most inconvenient I ever came across. I recommend you to give it up and turn Mahommedan."

He nodded a farewell, and went off. Matt sighed deeply, and made his way to the inn parlor.

Here captain Kermode and the officer, seated at the table, had begun to discuss a little matter of business, and were passing round a flagon of Hollands to facilitate its despatch.

"We heard of your schooner, captain," began the lieutenant of the *Mermaid*, "from the people of the *Grampus*, just in from the Clyde. It appears they are damaged, and have chartered you to take on a batch of the Jacobite prisoners to London."

"That's so, your honor," assented Kermode. "*Royal Mary* has just landed some claret from Bordeaux, and we're for London in ballast. Glad of a job."

"All the better. Of course the prisoners are in the hold?"

"Certainly, your honor."

"Did you see to that?"

"Not I, your honor. Doesn't amuse me to glare at a lot of poor devils on their way to be scragged. The *Grampus's* folks put 'em on board, and left a corporal's guard over 'em."

"Well, captain, if the hold takes them all, the point is, have you any cabin-space to spare?"

"Cabins?"

"Yes, sleeping-cabins—fit for passengers?"

"Well, there's two—you might say three. My partners and I can go forward at a pinch."

"I want a passage for three ladies to Sandwich," said the lieutenant.

"Ladies, is it?" asked the captain dubiously. "Well, if they'll put up with what we've got—they'd better come and see the quarters first. Are they townfolk, your honor?"

"No—passengers we've brought from Virginia under an order from the governor, a friend of theirs. You had better send your boat for them. We can't promise ours, for the

men are all over the town. If you'll wait here, I'll send you word. Is this your usual house-of-call?"

"Never was here before," replied the captain. "The 'Jolly Sailors' is our regular place. But we're here, and no need to budge."

A few words passed on the question of terms, and then the officer rose. He paid the score and went out, giving half a crown to the waiter. The latter pocketed it with surprise and admiration, and remarked to the captain,

"Lucky missis wasn't in the way to see that, sir, or I should have had to hand it over. Never was such meanness, I give you my words, sir—and worse than ever since gaffer Tregooze died."

"Widow?" asked the captain, with a sympathetic wink at his half-brother Matt.

"Yes, sir," replied the waiter. "Came here promiscuous one winter, and married the gaffer. Right under the nose of his relations, mind you, and all of them waiting like sharks for the old man's money. Left fifteen hundred pounds behind him when he died, and this house into the bargain. You should have heard his folks when they found they were to get nothing. Ready to cut missis's throat there and then, I do assure you. But it didn't matter to her. Bless you heart! no—leave her alone for that. Why, her tongue——"

At this moment the waiter appeared to hear the voice of authority in the distance, and discreetly vanished. The captain poured out a fresh glass of Hollands, and Matt went to the coffee-room fire to relight his pipe with a cinder. The midshipmen and their friend still kept up their noisy merry-making, and the pot-boys were busy attending to their repeated summonses.

During a moment's pause in the racket from the coffee-room the captain suddenly pricked up his ears, set down his half-raised glass, and turned a startled glance upon his companions.

"What's that?" he whispered.

A voice, whose tones seemed familiar to his ear, could be heard somewhere in the back part of the tavern, pouring a torrent of oburgations upon some of the servants. The next instant there was a cry of alarm from the coffee-room, and Matt Kermode, leaping over two tables amidst the crash of flying bottles and the shouts of the surprised

revellers rushed madly into the parlor and rolled out of sight under a large sofa which stood against the farthest wall.

"What on earth——" began Luke Kermode.

"Shut up!" whispered the captain. "It's *her*, by the Lord!"

A confirmatory groan came from under the sofa, followed by the piteous appeal,

"Save me, brother Kit! save me!"

"Easier said than done," growled the captain under his breath. "Let's see if the front door's clear."

But as the speaker was making a move to navigate the intricacies of the coffee-room, the strident voice came nearer, the opposite door opened, and the landlady sailed in. The captain's knees trembled beneath him. The widow Tregooze was the former madam Matthew Kermode.

The landlady had evidently just come in from a walk abroad. She wore a portentous bonnet, carried under her arm a specimen of the huge whalebone umbrella of the period, and dragged behind her, at the end of a string, a sour-looking poodle, which sniffed suspiciously at the legs of the nearest customers. The landlady swept majestically down the room, returning the salutations of some of the guests, and pulled up short, in considerable astonishment, opposite captain Kermode.

"Well, captain," she remarked, with severe ceremony, "I hope I see you in good health."

"I thank you, marm," replied the captain. "I've nothing to complain of. I hope you're the same."

"Pretty well, captain—pretty well. And how are your brothers?—your surviving brothers, I should say," she added lugubriously.

"About the same, marm."

The captain hesitated about giving any further information, but finally decided to add,

"They happen to be here, marm, awaiting to pay their respects to you."

He jerked his thumb towards the parlor, and called out to his half-brothers,

"Here, lads!"

"Don't trouble," interposed the landlady, to the cap-

tain's great alarm, "I'll sit down in the parlor a minute, and speak to them."

She went forward, acknowledging the nervous salutes of the three brothers, and took her seat in an arm-chair near the parlor door. The dog remained outside, at the full length of his tether, to snap at the heels of the passing pot-boys. Captain Kermode, concealing his anxiety under an impassive countenance, placed a chair opposite the widow, and sat down.

"So you've left Deal, marm," he observed tentatively, "and changed your station?"

The widow drew herself up.

"I have, captain—as you say. And a good deal for the better. It doesn't become one to speak ill of the departed, or I should say as my late husband——"

"Which of 'em, marm?" inquired the captain innocently.

"My second—your brother, captain," responded the widow, with a certain amount of acrimony. "I must say he treated me shamefully. No man with proper feeling would make away with himself so as to give his widow a bad name."

The captain assumed an expression of sympathy.

"Was that so, marm?" he asked.

"Of course it was. What could he expect the neighbors to think?"

"Very true, marm. I reckon he clean forgot that, lads," added the captain for the benefit of the three brothers.

"Reckon he did," murmured Luke dutifully.

"I hope—mark me, captain, I say I *hope*—he isn't suffering for it at this moment."

At this juncture the captain noticed that one of Matt's boots was protruding from under the sofa in full view of the landlady, and the perspiration broke out upon his forehead.

"He is, marm—he is, there's no doubt," he gasped, as he laboriously averted his gaze from the sofa.

"Nevertheless, captain," continued the widow, "I did my duty by him in spite of his contrariness. I paid every respect to his memory."

The captain waved his hand solemnly towards his half-brothers.

"Bear that in mind, lads," he remarked. "Every respect to his memory."

"I mourned for him twelve months," said the widow virtuously.

The captain's thoughts had become absorbed in the knotty problem of Matt's safety, and he only echoed pathetically, in an absent-minded sort of way,

"Ay, ay. She mourned for him twelve months."

Then he added, looking vaguely round the room for inspiration,

"Twelve months, mind ye."

"I did," affirmed the widow. "And I got the best crape and the best black silk that money could buy. I know my duty, if other people don't."

The captain nodded his appreciation of this token of regard, but said nothing beyond a respectful,

"Ay, ay, marm."

The widow now rose, brought her umbrella to the position of "ground arms," and curtsied majestically to the captain and his relatives by way of terminating the interview. The poodle took the opportunity of strolling into the room, and after inspecting the captain's calves, waddled towards the sofa. The next instant a paroxysm of furious barking from the poodle, and a strangled malediction from the victim in hiding, drew the widow's attention to the projecting high-lows.

"Why! there's a man under the sofa!" she cried. "Some thieving tramp, I'll be bound. Good dog! fetch him!"

The poodle did not want any encouragement to snap viciously at the supposed tramp, and the unfortunate Matt, not relishing an attack in the rear, twisted himself round so as to face his assailant. The captain, with a furtive kick at the poodle, endeavored to place himself between its mistress and the sofa. But the widow, catching sight of the fugitive's features, pushed the captain aside, and stooped down to get a nearer view. What she saw turned her face purple with amazement and indignation.

"Well, I never!" she gasped. "Come out of that, you miserable scoundrel!"

Before the captain could intervene the widow had grasped her umbrella by the nozzle, hooked the handle under Matt's waistbelt, and with one vigorous haul landed her truant husband in the middle of the floor.

"So it's you, is it?" she panted.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DIPLOMACY OF CAPTAIN KERMODE.

NOW that discovery had come, the captain promptly decided in his own mind that the only possible defence for the accused lay in a plea of mistaken identity.

"It's an off chance," he said to himself. "But we must bluff it. There's nothing else for it."

He cast a glance of warning towards Mark, Luke and John, who sat with their eyes glued to his face, and then turned to where Matt was lying curled up on the floor in a state of complete flaccidity.

"Get up, Bill," he ordered peremptorily, "and don't be so blessed shy. The lady won't eat you. I can't introduce you properly while you're squatting there like a dollop of putty."

Matt was too much crushed to grasp his relative's tactics, but he slowly raised himself to a sitting posture, and gazed at his boots with an air of hopeless dejection. The poodle, at a very emphatic admonition from the captain, had retreated growling behind his mistress, and the latter was sitting down again to recover breath after her exertions.

"Bill!" she echoed scornfully. "Have you christened him again, instead of burying him?"

The captain put on an air of extreme surprise.

"Marm," he said, "you make some mistake. This is our cousin Bill. We took him in when poor Matt cut his cable, being one of the family, and sorter pleasanter to us than having a stranger."

The widow received this explanation with contemptuous scepticism.

"Rubbish!" she snorted. "You won't bamboozle me that way, captain."

"Bamboozle!" echoed the captain, with the deepest reproach in his tones. "Marm, you don't suppose I should do such a thing to a lady?"

"I don't suppose anything about it," retorted the widow. "That's Matt. And I'll thank you to explain how he comes here."

The captain looked round at the three brothers with an effective assumption of good-natured tolerance.

"She takes him for poor Matt, lads. Curious, isn't it? Being one of the family, so to speak, reckon there's some sorter likeness."

"Like Matt?" put in Luke, thinking that some assistance was expected of him. "Not a bit."

The captain administered a furtive kick at the speaker for his clumsy diplomacy.

"Oh!" he remarked blandly, "you can't altogether say that, brother Luke. There must be some likeness, or marm wouldn't have been taken by it. I can't say as I ever noticed it myself. But I reckon there may be enough to strike an outsider. Not in figger, though. Bill here never had the figger of poor Matt."

"Never," assented Luke, thinking that he was here at all events on safe ground.

"No, never," went on the captain. "Matt was a fine figger of a man, he was. Bill here was never much to look at—was you, Bill? Always had a kinder mangy look, marm, had Bill. You can see for yourself, marm, now you get another sight of him."

The widow looked irresolutely at the figure on the floor, and was evidently a little shaken by the captain's positiveness.

"Don't tell me, marm," proceeded the captain, pursuing his advantage, "that a fine woman like you would ever have hitched yourself to such a poor stick as Bill here—it ain't in reason."

The widow tapped her foot impatiently on the floor.

"That's all gammon," she averred. "If yon isn't Matt, what made him hide under the sofa?"

"Shyness, marm," explained the captain promptly. "Nothing but shyness—I said so before. Bill's always shy before ladies."

This theory failed to commend itself to the widow.

"I don't believe a word of it," she retorted, with returning conviction. "Take off his coat and turn up his shirt-sleeves—I'll tell you who it is, at first sight."

The captain's heart sank within him, and he turned almost pale under his bronze of fifty years. The proposed test would be fatal. Matt had a dozen or more marks upon his arms, natural or artificial, any one of which would be enough to hang him on, and the captain felt that his diplomacy was unequal to the task of getting rid of them.

"I don't think Bill would like that," he muttered feebly, conscious of the weakness of the plea. "He's terrible shy before ladies, is Bill."

"He'll be shyer when he goes before the justices for deserting his lawful wife," replied the widow triumphantly.

At this prophecy Matt could not repress a groan, and his three brothers exchanged glances of despair. They could see that the captain was at the bottom of his resources, and this meant that all was over. For their brother Kit to fail them was the end of the world.

The captain drew a deep sigh, and looked blankly at the floor. Then he suddenly raised his head, and a gleam of light came into his eyes.

"I don't say but what you're right, marm," he remarked, in a more cheerful tone. "It'll settle the matter, and Bill must lump it. Only you'll agree with me, marm, that it's hard on a shy man to be kinder inspected before a roomful of people."

The captain here jerked his thumb towards the door, where in truth some half-dozen inquisitive onlookers had gathered to see what was going on.

"What I say, marm," he continued, "is this. We'll clear this room of everybody but you and me and Bill, and I'll undertake to satisfy you in the twinkle of a lamb's tail. I can't say no fairer than that."

Before the widow could raise any objection to this proposal, the captain had signalled to his half-brothers, by a comprehensive sweep of the arm, to beat an immediate retreat. They accordingly stumbled out of the room in a heap, John closing the door behind him, and the captain turned the key in the lock.

"Get up, Bill, and don't be an ass," he remarked curtly.

"And now, marm, if you don't mind, I think it's time we talked a little sense."

"I think so, too," snorted the widow.

"By sense, marm," explained the captain, "I mean business. We understand, marm, that you've come into a fairish property by the death of the late lamented Tregooze?"

"Mr. Tregooze was comfortably off, certainly," admitted the widow, with a toss of her head.

"And he left it all to his dear wife, as was right and proper?" hazarded the captain.

"Of course he did."

The captain heaved a sigh of relief.

"His dear wife," repeated the captain meditatively.

"Those were the words, I make no doubt."

"The very words," assented the widow.

"I reckon he was too careful of your feelings to mention names, marm. Naturally he wouldn't."

"No. Why should he?"

The captain chuckled inwardly.

"It's done sometimes, you see, marm. 'My dear wife so-and-so.' I don't hold with it myself."

"There was no occasion," said the widow. "He had no children, and of course his will bequeathed everything to his wife."

The captain looked steadily at the speaker, and then shook his head with a pitying smile.

"Excuse me, marm," he said. "But you don't quite seem to understand. The late Tregooze had plenty of relations, hadn't he?"

"Cousins and so on," replied the widow. "Nothing nearer."

"But all blood-relations, marm?"

"Of course."

The captain scratched his chin, and surveyed the widow in a fashion that made her begin to feel a little uneasy.

"Allow me to ask, marm," he went on, "whether you did well at the 'Crown and Anchor'? It was only on lease, if I remember right."

The widow looked vindictively at Matt.

"I did well enough," she said, "till your brother here disgraced himself. Then business fell off a good deal, and

I lost money—all owing to him. The lease ran out the next year, and I had to give it up."

"Ah!" ejaculated the captain, in a completely satisfied tone. "So I take it, marm, you wouldn't have much in the old stocking if it were not for the late Tregooze?"

"If I haven't, captain," replied the widow tartly, "that is neither here or there."

"Well—I don't know," demurred the captain slowly.

His tone and expression of face made the widow feel more uneasy than before. The captain turned to look at Matt, who sat with averted and hang-dog face near the door, and then brought his eyes back to the widow. He leaned forward, laid his finger against his nose, and asked almost in a whisper,

"Changed your mind about the likeness, marm?"

"Good gracious! no," replied the widow angrily. "You must take me for a fool."

The captain leaned back in his chair, and tucked his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat.

"I do, marm," he remarked severely. "The biggest fool I ever met in all my born days. I shouldn't have believed there was such a fool on earth if I hadn't your own word for it."

"My own word!" echoed the astonished widow.

"That's what I said, marm. If you can find me a bigger fool than a woman who'd chuck away fifteen hundred pounds, the 'Three Tuns,' and a fine business—and all for the sake of him," with a wave of his hand in the direction of Matt—"why, I'd like to put her in a raree show."

"Who talks of chucking away?" asked the widow.

"You, marm. Certainly the property will be a fine thing for all those cousins that are so fond of you. And they may be very deserving folks, for all I know. Lord! it would do one good to see their faces when they hear they're going to get it after all, and you're to be a pauper. I should like to be there, I should."

"Captain, have you taken leave of your wits?" asked the widow seriously.

The captain rose, took up his hat, and fetched his stick out of the corner.

"I think we've had about enough talk, marm," he said blandly. "You can settle matters as you like—only set-

tle 'em one way or the other. If this here fellow is Matt, you're his wife. If you're his wife, you couldn't be Tregooze's wife. If you were not Tregooze's wife, every farthing of his money goes to his blood-relations."

The widow fell back in her chair, with her mouth open, and her usually rubicund visage quite blanched with the shock of the captain's revelation.

"It can't be!" she gasped.

"Every farthing," repeated the captain. "And there's bigamy in it as well. I forget whether that's a hanging matter," he added soothingly, "but I know if it is you'll die game. Me and partners will come and see you turned off, just out of respect, you may take your davy. We're always ready to do the fair thing by our friends."

The widow was too much staggered by this view of things to make any reply, and the captain went on,

"I'm not much of a marrying man myself, as you know, marm. But if any of these cousins of Tregooze's are decent-looking women, me and the others wouldn't mind making up to them as soon as they've got the property—I reckon it would console you to think it hadn't all gone out of the family. I can't say no fairer than that."

He jerked his thumb towards Matt, and added,

"Of course, you see, marm, I'm talking as if Matt was alive. What do you think? Does Bill here remind you of him so much as all that?"

This inquiry was accompanied by a wink of infinite meaning, and the captain stroked his chin pensively while he awaited an answer.

The widow heaved a profound sigh, and looked more than once at Matt before arriving at her final decision. Then she replied, in regretful tones,

"Perhaps you are right after all, captain. I made a great mistake when I took that man for my late husband."

"It was a great mistake, marm—for Bill," assented the captain, as he unlocked the door and flung it wide open.

A glance at his face reassured the three brothers, who were sitting at a table near, but they judiciously held their peace. The widow flounced past them without speaking, and the captain signed to them to come back to the parlor. Then he shut the door, sank into a chair, and wiped the perspiration from his face with a bandanna handkerchief.

"We've weathered the storm, lads," he remarked. "But it was a tight squeeze. I wouldn't go through it again for a hundred pound."

He stowed away his handkerchief, lit his pipe, and went on.

"I shall have to wait for the lieutenant. But you'd better get Matt out of here at once, and put him on board. He's about as spry as a drowned puppy, it seems to me."

Matt's condition made this simile appear so little exaggerated that his brothers lost no time in acting on the captain's suggestion, and walked the rescued benedict off between them without waiting to learn how the feat of deliverance had been managed. The captain stayed behind to await the promised message from the lieutenant of the *Mermaid*. This was forthcoming shortly afterwards, and as it included a request that the passengers should be transferred to the *Royal Mary* in the latter's boat, the captain went off to arrange the matter.

As he walked out of the "Three Tuns" he was met by the abbé Gaultier, who forthwith volunteered to give the captain his company to the water's edge. The abbé had learned that the passengers were still on board the *Mermaid*, and it did not appear so far that Dorrington's reappearance had been made known to them. But something had been said about their desiring to reach their Kentish home by sea rather than by the fatiguing land journey, and the abbé suggested to the captain that he should offer the accommodation of the *Royal Mary* for the purpose.

"Thank your honor kindly," replied the captain, not suspecting the abbé's personal interest in the matter, "but the job's done already. The folks from the *Mermaid* are coming on board as soon as we can send for them."

"All the better for you," remarked the abbé. "I suppose it won't prevent you from giving me a passage to London. That was really what I wanted to speak to you about."

"Don't see where we can put your honor," replied the captain. "These folks take all the cabins."

"The deck-house will do very well for me," said the abbé. "Better, perhaps, as you are having so many strangers."

The captain scratched his head dubiously.

"That's about full, too," he replied. "The corporal's guard bunk there."

"What is that?" asked the abbé.

"Well, your honor, you see we've been partly chartered to take some of the prisoners from the *Grampus* to London, and the guard sleeps on deck."

The abbé had no particular desire to be within reach of recognition by the men he had betrayed, and was rather taken aback by the captain's intelligence.

"Where are these prisoners, then?" he asked.

"In the hold, your honor."

"Will they come on deck?"

"Depends on the corporal. He might let them up, one or two at a time, for a spell of fresh air."

"They are in irons, of course?"

"Certainly, your honor."

The abbé considered the position of matters for a little, and eventually decided that it would be easy for him to keep out of sight if occasion arose.

"The deck-house is pretty roomy," he remarked. "If there is really space for one more to sleep there, I shouldn't mind a squeeze for three or four days."

"You'd better come aboard, your honor, and see," replied the captain, who never lost a chance of doing business. "Here's the dinghy."

The captain and his companion were rowed on board the *Royal Mary*, and after a little negotiation it was settled that the abbé could be provided with a bunk in the deck-house, while sharing the poop-deck and the main cabin with the other passengers during the day.

The schooner's boat was in the meantime despatched to the *Mermaid*, to fetch away the expected party and their belongings. Finding that the *Royal Mary* would not sail until just before dawn the following morning, the abbé decided to go ashore again and remain there till after nightfall, so as to be able to defer his meeting with the Wray party until they were actually out at sea. He returned about nine o'clock, learned that his fellow-voyagers were already in their cabins, and went to the deck-house to turn in for the night.

CHAPTER XXXI.

OFF PORTLAND BILL.

DURING the early morning and forenoon the wind was fair, and the schooner made sufficiently rapid progress to have left the Start far astern. Gaultier felt quite sure that if Muriel should learn of her father's reappearance while the *Royal Mary* was within reach of Dorrington Hall, she would insist on being landed at Halcombe. As the abbé's chief hope lay in utilizing the various opportunities of the voyage to make a good impression upon Muriel before she met her father, it was no part of his programme to shorten their sea-passage without occasion. He had therefore decided to delay his news until it was quite out of the question to put back into Halcombe harbor, and accordingly kept in the deck-house or in the bows until the *Royal Mary* was well on her way towards Portland Bill.

At daybreak it had begun to drizzle, and this was succeeded by several hours of heavy rain, which had kept the occupants of the cabins from making any appearance. The wet morning fell in rather conveniently with the abbé's plans, as it saved him from the necessity of seeming to avoid his fellow-passengers until it suited him to meet them.

Later on the weather cleared, and the abbé went on to the poop, where Luke Kermode was steering, to await developments. Presently he heard the door between the cabin and the main deck slam with the wind, and two ladies made their appearance up the poop-stairs. They were Avice Wray and Muriel Dorrington. The former was dressed in black.

It seemed to the abbé that Avice had not changed in the least since he last saw her. But although Muriel's face was paler and graver than when they had met at Wray Manor, and before the fatal day at Maidstone, to the abbé she was

more beautiful than ever. One glance at her profile, as she stood against the bulwarks looking towards the invisible coastline, was sufficient to revive in its full force the passion which had always dominated him in her presence. A mist came before his eyes, his pulse beat furiously, and he thanked his stars that he had a second or two in which to recover his self-possession. He took a letter from his pocket, and affected to be reading it while he looked out of the corner of his eye at Muriel and her friend.

After a minute the girls turned to walk towards the wheel, and caught sight of the abbé. It was evident that they were prepared to find a fellow-passenger on board, for Avice made the slightest possible bend of her head as she passed near. But there was no trace of recognition in her face, and the abbé could see that as far as Avice was concerned he was completely forgotten.

He, however, raised his hat, and looked fixedly at Muriel as she followed her companion's example. Here the abbé was more lucky. Muriel's glance of uninterested courtesy gave place to one of quick remembrance, and she stopped in evident surprise. The abbé put on an expression of amazement and gratification, and with another salute came forward to pay his respects.

"Permit me, mesdemoiselles," he said, "to say that this is really a charming surprise for me. I understood that the captain had two or three other passengers, but you are absolutely the very last persons in the world I should have dreamed of meeting."

He arranged seats for the two girls, and Avice, who had by this time recalled him to her recognition, remarked:

"Captain Kermode told us a M. de Beauval was on board, but we did not associate that name with yourself."

"It is one of our family names," explained the abbé, in a careless tone. "As a matter of fact, my humble share in the negotiations which led to the recent peace has made my better-known name a little inconvenient to me in this country. You are probably aware that the treaty of Utrecht is not very popular here, and that most of those concerned in making it have come off rather badly. Naturally one prefers to avoid needless unpleasantness, and I therefore travel *incognito*."

"You are doubtless bound for London, M. l'abbé?"

"In the first instance, mademoiselle. But merely on my way to Wray Manor."

"Indeed? how is that?"

"For nothing in the world but to make inquiries—for the fourth or fifth time, I may say—about yourself and mistress Dorrington. I have just come from Dorrington Hall, where I went for the same purpose—quite uselessly, as of course you know."

The abbé looked at Muriel while saying this, but her face expressed nothing beyond a little polite surprise. Avice, however, did not scruple to laugh.

"I am sure we ought to be very much obliged to you," she said. "May one ask the occasion of your solicitude?"

"Certainly, mademoiselle," returned the abbé blandly. "The occasion was that I particularly wished to see you—or rather to see mademoiselle Dorrington. And both of you seemed to have utterly disappeared from the face of the earth."

"We have been paying a long visit—much longer than was intended—in Virginia," explained Avice. "Mistress Dorrington joined us there two years ago."

"I wish I had known," said the abbé. "Not, however, that it would have been of much use until recently. Still, even a well-grounded report is better than nothing."

"What report?" asked Avice.

"I am speaking of the reports about M. Dorrington," replied the abbé, addressing himself directly to Muriel.

"My father?"

"Certainly. I have constantly occupied myself with that matter ever since I saw you. You may perhaps recollect that when we last met, I suggested that his death was possibly still a matter of doubt."

A flash of pain across Muriel's face warned the abbé that some associations connected with this reminiscence were as vivid as ever. She looked away for a moment, and then said, with a little tremor in her voice:

"You spoke of reports, M. l'abbé. Do you mean recent ones?"

"Yes—reports that M. Dorrington had been seen in South America. But of course all that is of no consequence now."

"Of no consequence, monsieur?"

"None, mademoiselle—seeing that I was on my way to Wray Manor at this moment on purpose to communicate definite facts to you. That is, if I could find you. I hoped to do so, but really I did not expect it. And now I have met you in so unhopèd-for a manner, I am almost afraid to tell you my news."

"Bad news, monsieur?" asked Avicè, who saw that Muriel hesitated to put the same question herself.

"On the contrary, mademoiselle. It is that M. Dorrington, as I surmised all along, is alive."

Muriel clasped her hands together.

"Alive! my father alive!" she exclaimed.

"Alive and well."

"Who says so?"

"I, mademoiselle."

"You know it then, monsieur?"

"I have seen him, mademoiselle."

"When? where?"

"Yesterday, mademoiselle. In Plymouth."

Muriel looked incredulously at the abbé.

"Monsieur," she said, "you must be mistaken—it is impossible——"

"I do not think there is any doubt, mademoiselle. M. Dorrington is well known. He arrived at Plymouth the night before last, with a certain M. Coverdale."

"Mr. Coverdale!" echoed the two girls simultaneously.

"I was told that was the name of his companion. The two left for Dorrington Hall in the course of the day."

"Oh! why did I not know before?"

The abbé waved his hands sympathetically.

"Mademoiselle, at all events you know now. And your meeting will happily be delayed only a few days. For myself, as soon as I heard of the news, I immediately took a passage in this ship for Kent—although I had of course only the smallest hope that I should find you at Wray. I have made several journeys there already for the purpose of seeing you, as I said just now—in order to inform you of the earlier reports about M. Dorrington."

"That was very kind of you," said Muriel frankly. "But do you know why we have never heard of my father all this time?"

"It appears, mademoiselle, that he was first of all in

prison for many years, and then, after his release or escape—whichever it was—he was shipwrecked. I believe he has only been in England a few days."

Muriel turned to Avice, as an idea suddenly struck her, and asked:

"If my father is at Dorrington, Avice, why should I go on to Wray? Would not the captain land me at Halcombe or Dartmouth?"

"We are much too far east, mademoiselle," interrupted the abbé. "And the wind would be dead against us in turning back. Weymouth might be practicable, I fancy. But it would be a rough journey for you to take across country to Dorrington, and scarcely safe either—alone, at all events. If you think of doing that, I venture to offer my escort as being almost imperative."

"That would be troubling you too much, M. l'abbé."

The abbé bowed politely.

"On the contrary, mademoiselle, you will see that the further prosecution of the voyage, as far as I am concerned, is now useless. I was simply a messenger, and I have delivered my message. My only business, if you will permit it to be so, is to hasten your meeting with your father, and I trust you will not refuse any further help I can render in that direction."

It was difficult to find an excuse for declining so obviously reasonable a proposal, and Muriel therefore expressed her thanks for the offered escort. The abbé's hopes rose high at the prospect of the uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* which his plan would afford, and he went off in great elation to the captain. That worthy made no objection to the new programme, but pointed out that, owing to the thick weather, and the late rising of the moon, he could not venture to run for Weymouth in the dark, and would therefore have to stand off the coast until daybreak.

The abbé went back to report the captain's decision to the two girls, who had just been joined by madam Rostherne. The good lady could not at first be persuaded to believe in the reappearance of the brother whom she had supposed to be dead for more than twenty years. But the abbé's story could not well be gainsaid, and she then offered, to his intense disappointment, to join Muriel in the proposed landing at Weymouth. The abbé, hiding his dis-

gust, bethought him next of what was due to convention, and remarked:

"I have been remiss, madame, in not inquiring after M. Wray. He is not with you, I understand?"

Muriel and Avice had just gone out of hearing, and the dame replied,

"You see Avice is in mourning. The squire died about two months since. He had an attack of paralysis shortly after arriving in Virginia, but we hoped he would recover sufficiently to be brought back to England."

"You were all of a party?" inquired the abbé.

"Muriel and I reached Virginia, to join the squire and Avice, just after his first seizure, and we were more or less obliged to remain until his second attack, which proved fatal. I daresay you heard of the shocking end of my niece's engagement to that Mr. Gwynett?"

"I saw the newspaper accounts of the murder at the time," replied the abbé.

"For myself," remarked the dame, "I thought the whole affair a good riddance. But my niece was very much affected by it—in fact, she was not herself for some little time afterwards. I took her to live near some distant relatives of ours in Yorkshire for a while, to see what new faces and places would do for her."

"The experiment was successful, I am pleased to see."

"Not at all—at least, not at the time. But after some months, we were urgently pressed by the Wrays to join them during their visit to America, in the hope that a still more complete change of scene would be of service to Muriel. I am glad to say it proved to be so. She is quite recovered now, as you have noticed."

The girls returned at this juncture, and the conversation turned upon general matters. It was of course obvious that madam Rostherne's curtailment of her voyage would involve that of Avice's also, and the abbé saw that his hoped-for opportunities of being alone with Muriel on shore were likely to be few and far between. It was therefore necessary to strengthen his position as much as possible before the *Royal Mary* touched land again. Accordingly he employed all his conversational resources, which indeed were fairly extensive, to interest and amuse Muriel while she remained outside her cabin, and was so far suc-

cessful that her former antipathy to him remained more or less in abeyance. This however arose chiefly from the fact that he mustered enough tact and self-control to steer clear of anything savoring of sentiment, and especially to avoid all reference to by-gone times and matters with which Muriel had been in any way connected.

As the afternoon passed the weather grew rougher, and when evening came on the *Royal Mary* shortened sail in order to hold her abreast of Portland Bill till morning. The rain, however, kept off, and the two girls remained most of the time on the poop-deck.

Captain Kermode, who had seen very little of his passengers when they came on board the night before, was in the meanwhile considerably exercised in his mind. The first sight of Muriel's face, when she came on deck in the full light of day, had brought vividly to his recollection the scene after the execution at Maidstone. On pointing her out to his half-brothers, they at once agreed that this was without doubt the young lady who had been the subject of their commiseration on that occasion. Whatever might be her relationship to "the squire," as they were accustomed to style Ambrose Gwynett, it was evidently one of the closest, and an uncomfortable conviction possessed the captain's mind that she ought to share in the secret of the rescue from the gibbet. It was true that the squire had subsequently paid the debt of nature in the harbor of St. Malo. But that was a different matter, and the captain had a vague impression that amongst "the quality," it was occasionally a matter of considerable importance to the survivors whether a man died at one time or at another. On the other hand, the heroine of the episode at Maidstone was quite clearly wandering in her mind then, whatever might be the case now, and it was an open question whether any illusion to it would be intelligible to her.

The captain's indecision would probably have outlasted the voyage but for the circumstance that the recognition between himself and Muriel turned out to be mutual. Towards sunset he came on the poop to relieve Matt at the wheel, and found Muriel there alone, the others being at the moment dispersed in their several quarters. The captain touched his forelock respectfully, planted him-

self behind the wheel, and grasped the handles with his usual stolid air.

Muriel, who had previously only seen him at a distance, looked at him for a moment, and then said,

"Captain Kermode, I think I must have met you before."

The remark presented itself to the captain in the light of an invitation to relieve her mind. He promptly replied,

"Yes, marm."

"Where was it?"

"I reckon it was at Maidstone, marm. Four years ago last February."

Muriel turned pale and she looked at the captain with dilated eyes.

"You were there?" she almost whispered.

"Yes, marm—me and my mates. We saw you. You were following the poor gentleman."

"You knew it was my——?"

Muriel stopped, and the break in her voice caused the captain to wink with a good deal of energy.

"We guessed, marm," he replied sympathetically. "But that wasn't the end of the matter. Me and my mates have been making up our minds to tell you something. We reckon you'll hold your tongue, and not get us into trouble over the job?"

The captain beckoned Muriel to come a little nearer, and, after earnest injunctions to secrecy, narrated the exploit of the cross-roads, the rescue of Gwynett from the gibbet, and his subsequent death by drowning at St. Malo while rowing back to shore from the *Royal Mary*. The captain had not lived fifty years without learning the elements of discretion, and accordingly said nothing whatever about the circumstance that Thekla had been Gwynett's companion on the occasion in question. But he emphasized the fact that Gwynett had, according to his own account at Havre, made more than one journey to England to get news of his betrothed, of course without result, and that his efforts to learn the fate of his missing companion at the "Crown and Anchor" had been equally unsuccessful. This unexpected revelation drove all thoughts of her father from Muriel's mind. Her eyes turned instinctively towards the dim southern horizon which hid the Breton

coast from her view. There lay the scene of the last catastrophe to her lover, and she reflected, with the bitterest regret, that but for her unexplained absence from Wray, this final tragedy need never have befallen him.

The captain, having told his story, stood silent behind his wheel, and cast an occasional glance of dissatisfaction at the threatening sky to windward. The corporal and his men were relieving each other in their sentry duty over the fore-hatch, and two of the Kermodes were on the look-out in the bows. The gloom of night came on rapidly, the wind was rising, and a faint lurid afterglow gleamed on the heaving masses of the southwestern sea.

"In for a dirty night," muttered the captain to himself, as he felt some drops of rain upon his face. "You'd best get under cover, marm," he added aloud. "There's a bit of a shower coming."

Muriel started from her reverie, and looked round. Then she laid her hand on the captain's sleeve.

"Captain Kermode," she said, in a low voice, "I shall never forget what you did for Ambrose. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart. Tell your brothers so from me."

"Lord, marm," responded the captain, "nobody could have done anything less. "We're all sorry for both of you, marm—you can take your davy on that."

Muriel could not trust herself to say any more, but turned to leave the poop by the deck staircase. At this moment Gaultier came out of the deck-house towards the cabin. He was a few steps from the stairs when Muriel, who had nearly reached the bottom, lost her balance through a sudden and violent lurch of the schooner. Before she could grasp the handrail she was flung towards the deck, and was saved from a fall only by Gaultier's springing forward and clasping her in his arms.

The surprise and ecstasy of finding the object of his passion actually in his embrace was too much for the abbé's self-control. In the rapture of the moment he completely lost his head, and could not refrain from pressing a fervent kiss upon the lips which were so invitingly close to his own.

"My dearest one!" he murmured.

Muriel freed herself from his clasp with an energy which

made him stagger two or three paces backwards across the deck, and faced him with flashing eyes.

"M. Gaultier," she panted, "you are a ruffian and a coward. Never speak to me again. I look upon your very presence as an insult."

She turned her back as she spoke, and entered the cabin. The abbé drew a deep breath, and looked round. It was nearly dark, and no one appeared to have observed them.

"I must have been tempted of the devil," he muttered. "Of a she-devil, rather. Well, that settles matters, it is clear. All is over—unless one gets a chance of strangling her. I think I should enjoy that—for the time, at all events. Afterwards—perhaps——"

The abbé went slowly back to the deck-house, emptied one of the bottles of brandy he carried amongst his baggage, and started upon another.



CHAPTER XXXII.

THE HOLD OF THE ROYAL MARY.

I N the pitch-dark hold of the *Royal Mary* twelve men lay in various attitudes upon the floor, ironed together in twos and fours. Some of them were asleep, and others, leaning against the sheathing, carried on snatches of conversation whenever they could make their voices heard above the wash of the bilge-water beneath them and the dashing of the waves against the ship's side. Bread and water for forty-eight hours had been furnished to them in baskets and cans the previous night. But the demands of one or two malcontents for tobacco had been summarily disposed of by the information that the guard had none to spare.

Towards evening one of the prisoners, thanks to an open knot-hole in the bulkhead which separated the hold from the forecastle, noticed a light in the latter sanctuary. He was able by vigorous bawling to attract the attention of the bearer of the light, who was Luke Kermode.

"Ay! ay!" replied Luke, when he had found out where the hail came from. "What is it?"

"We've no tobacco," was the response. "Have you any to spare?"

"No 'bacca!" muttered Luke to himself feelingly. "That's hard lines. Going to be scragged, and not even a plug of 'bacca amongst them."

He put his mouth to the hole, and shouted,

"Ay! ay! plenty."

The voice asked,

"Can you pass some down here?"

"Wait, and I'll see."

Luke went on deck, and reported the request to the captain, who received it with complete sympathy.

"Give the poor devils a pound of pig-tail," he said. "They may never get another chew in this world."

"Reckon I must speak to the corporal first," demurred Luke.

"The corporal be hanged," responded the captain. "Pass the twist through the hole in the bulkhead, and hold your tongue about it."

This manœuvre was duly effected, and the prisoners, whose hands were not fettered, were promptly at work dividing the welcome gift amongst them. More than one carried flint and steel, and pipes were soon glowing in the darkness.

It happened, not long after, that a stray chip of dry wood was found on the floor, and was cautiously kindled by one of the smokers. Its feeble light allowed the interior of the hold to be dimly seen, and the faces of the prisoners gleamed pallidly against the black timbers. The holder of the burning chip was Noel Wray, and his companion, ironed to him by the ankles, was Ambrose Gwynett.

The latter speedily found a handful more of the chips lying in a heap near the side of the ship.

"These will be useful," he said to Noel, "seeing we haven't an inch of paper amongst us. If we could only find a bit of tarred rope——"

"There's enough of that," replied Noel. "I stumbled over a coil when we were first put down here."

Two or three chips were lighted, and with their aid the coil of rope was soon discovered. Nimble fingers were promptly at work untwisting the tarry strands, and before long a clumsy sort of torch was ignited.

"Cover it up at once," said Gwynett, "or they'll see it from the deck. Take my cloak."

Four of the men held the cloak stretched out horizontally over the light, and the rest of the party made a hurried search round the floor to see if anything useful could be found. Except, however, for a pile of old sails in one corner, the hold appeared to be empty. But noticing a stray bolt or two of iron at the edge of the heap, Gwynett and Noel turned the canvas over. Under it was a heap of old iron, marlinspikes, and chain-plates, two or three blocks, and a heavy hammer.

"Nothing of any use to us," said Noel. "We can't eat them, and we shan't have a chance of breaking anyone's head with them."

"Probably not," replied Gwynett. "But I don't see why we need have these bilboes on our legs any longer. We shall be better ready for accidents if we can free ourselves with that hammer."

The suggestion was acted upon forthwith. Strips of their clothing were tucked in thickly between the prisoner's ankles and the shackles, and the padlocks were smashed by using the hammer and one of the marlinspikes. Care had to be taken to strike the blows only at irregular intervals, and it took more than half an hour to free the whole of the party. Then the torch was blown out in order to run no needless risk of discovery, and the prisoners, free at all events from the galling restraint of the bilboes, lay down again as before.

"Certainly this is a little more comfortable," remarked Noel to Gwynett, after a prolonged rub at his ankles, sore with a week's confinement in the irons. "But I am afraid that is all. It is really a pity, my dear fellow, that you have got yourself into such a mess merely for the sake of my indifferent carcass."

"We'll see what Avice says about that—if we ever get the chance. I don't despair of it yet. It was unlucky those rascals robbed me of my papers as well as my money when we were captured—still more that none of them could read. Still, unless they are in too much of a hurry in London, we shall be able, I hope, to get at lord Stair again, to say nothing of the regent. For the other poor fellows here, I am afraid there is no chance, worse luck."

"As brave a set of men, too, as ever fought in a losing cause. And for them to be brought to the gallows by that infernal French deserter—really, it puts me in a rage even to think of it."

"You know nothing of him?"

"No. He was not with my regiment—he and a few stragglers from Graham's company joined our party while I was out foraging, so I missed seeing him. It was just before you overtook us. De Beauval, he called himself—so Graham's men said. He seemed to have been intimate with the chevalier."

"Birds of a feather."

There was silence for a few minutes, and then Gwynett remarked,

"We are in for a gale, I fancy. The schooner is beginning to feel the wind. Let us hope she is decently seaworthy."

As the corporal and his guard had exaggerated their official discretion to the point of refusing the captives any information about their floating prison, they were so far ignorant even of its name. As it happened, none of the Kermodes had been seen by Gwynnett.

The straining of the vessel increased as the evening wore on. By nine o'clock it was evident that the seamanship of the crew would be pretty severely taxed if they were to get through the night without disaster. About this time the prisoners saw the light reappear in the forecastle, and Noel went to the knot-hole to interrogate the bearer. He knocked on the bulkhead with a marlinspike, and elicited the reply,

"Ay! ay!"

"What ship's this?"

"The *Royal Mary*, of Nantucket."

Gwynnett heard the name, as repeated by Noel, and started from his place.

"Ask him the captain's name," he called to Noel.

The reply came from the forecastle,

"Kit Kermode."

Noel had of course heard from Gwynnett the whole story of the Deal rescue. He recollected the captain's name at once, and he called to Gwynnett to come to the bulkhead.

"It's your obliging friend of the cross-roads," he said. "Had you not better get a word with him?"

Gwynnett took Noel's place at the knot-hole, and asked,

"Are you captain Kermode?"

"No. I'm his brother."

"Which brother?"

"Matt."

"Where's the captain?"

"At the wheel."

Before any further words could be exchanged there was a violent crash against the side of the vessel, followed by another farther astern. A loud shout summoned Matt on deck, and on arriving there he found that the ship's boat had been stove in by a heavy sea.

During the next few minutes the schooner seemed to be

tossed in every direction, and she then settled down into a continuous rolling. The violence of the storm increased rapidly, and more than once a sound like an explosion rang out above the uproar, announcing that one of the sails had been torn to ribbons or blown away. It was not quite dark, but the moon only rarely gleamed feebly through the hurrying scud.

Presently Matt went to the captain on the poop. His face betokened some bad news.

"Brother Kit," he announced, "we've sprung a leak somewhere. There's six inches of water come in since the boat was smashed."

"Who's at the pump?" asked the captain.

"John and Mark. But we can't spare two of us—reckon you'd better put the soldiers on the job."

The captain went to the door of the deck-house and looked in. The abbé and the guard were drinking together in a very amicable way, and it was evident that the former's stock of brandy had furnished the wherewithal for the party's potations. It will be understood that the abbé's temporary habit of total abstinence had not survived the shock which he received on board the *Royal Mary* at St. Malo, and that since that date he had done his best to make up for lost time. Having on the present occasion brought half a dozen bottles of brandy on board with him, he was in a position to offer drinks all round, and had found the corporal and his men in no way disinclined to accept them. When the captain entered the deck-house the abbé had reached the mood of sullen taciturnity which usually marked with him the advanced stage of a debauch. Two out of the four men, presumably with weaker heads than the others, were already more or less drunk, and the others were only sober in comparison with them.

"Corporal," said the captain, "my mates want a little help at the pumps. We've a leak somewhere, and we're too short-handed to look after the ship and keep the water under at the same time. Will you put your men on? If not, I must get some of the prisoners up to help."

"Of course we'll help," replied the corporal with effusion. "Get up, lads, and put yourselves at the captain's orders."

The attempt made by two of the guards to execute this order was so obviously futile that the captain promptly declined to be troubled with their services.

"They're no good," he growled. "How's your other mate?"

The third guard got on his feet with difficulty, and the corporal followed his example. But the first lurch of the ship sent them to the floor again, and as one of them fell against Gaultier, he was saluted by a volley of execrations from the abbé.

"This won't do, corporal," said the captain contemptuously. "The whole lot of you will only be in the way. Some of your lags below must lend a hand. Give me your keys—I shall want six at a time."

"It's your responsibility, captain," acceded the corporal from the floor. "You say ship's in danger, do you?"

"That's what I say."

"Very well," repeated the corporal amiably. "Ship's in danger. Captain calls on his majesty's officer for assistance. All right. Here's the keys."

With a good deal of effort he extracted the keys of the bilboes from his pocket, and handed them to the captain.

"Where's the key of the hatch-bars?" asked the captain impatiently.

These were the fastenings which the ship's carpenter of the *Grampus* had placed on the hatches as a further measure of security, when the prisoners had been transferred to the *Royal Mary*. The abbé looked up with a startled air.

"What the devil is all this?" he asked angrily. "You are not going to let those fellows loose on deck?"

"I'm going to put 'em to work," replied the captain, "if you call that letting 'em loose."

"Curse me if I'll have it," cried the abbé, rising in a fury, and throwing discretion to the winds. "The ruffians will tear me limb from limb."

"Why?" snorted the captain, who had no idea of being snubbed on his own deck.

"That's my affair," replied the abbé, recollecting himself a little too late. "To set traitors free is an act of treason. The corporal deserves hanging for consenting to it."

"If you don't stow your jaw," retorted the outraged cap-

tain, "I'll clap you in irons yourself for mutiny. Hand over the hatch-bar key, corporal."

The corporal had just extracted the key from another pocket when a loud shout, emanating from the throats of the whole body of prisoners in the hold, made itself heard above the roar of the tempest. The captain went out, lay down with his ear on the hatch, and kicked it by way of signal.

"Water in the hold!" came out of the depths below. "The ship's filling. Let us out on deck!"

"Ay! ay!" replied the captain, at the top of his voice.

He ran back to the deck-house and found the abbé threatening the corporal with unheard-of penalties if he permitted the release of the prisoners. The captain's renewed demand for the key raised the abbé's rage and fear to desperation point. He snatched the key from the shaking fingers of the corporal, staggered past the captain, and flung it far into the sea.

The captain did not waste time in expressing his boundless indignation at the abbé's trick, but picked up an axe, and set to work to break open the top of the hatch, shouting to the prisoners that he would throw them the keys of their shackles. Matt came up at the same moment to help, and the abbé, filled with terror at the impending release of his victims and their probable vengeance, turned to seek refuge in the poop-cabin.

The wind was now coming in furious gusts, with intervals of diminished violence between, while occasional flashes of lightning lit up the ship and the sea. Luke Kermode was still at the wheel, and his brothers Mark and John were laboring at the pump. The three ladies had hitherto remained in their cabins. But the rapid rise of the storm, and the audible disaster to the ship's boat, had roused them to a sense of impending danger, and they had all got up and dressed themselves. The sound of the captain's hatchet had further alarmed them, and rather than tolerate any further confinement, they had come out upon the main deck. But the poop seemed to offer a better protection from the showers of spray which were flung across the deck, and they were at this moment endeavoring to shelter themselves from the greatest force of the gale under the weather bulwarks.

The abbé saw that the coast was clear and decided to seek refuge in the cabin. He stumbled in at the door, bolted it behind him, and seated himself on the bench at the table. He still carried in one hand the bottle from which he had been drinking in the deck-house, and he placed it on the table before him with a sigh of relief.

For a few minutes the sound of the captain's hatchet came at intervals through the din of the storm, and then it was drowned in a furious blast. The next instant there was a loud report, followed by a tremendous crash and a shock which jarred the whole ship from stem to stern. The maintopmast, with its yards and sail, had fallen amidships, crushing the deck-house into splinters, and covering the hatches and deck with a mountain of wreckage.

Two of the guards were killed on the spot, while the others were seriously injured. The captain and Matt escaped with a knock-down blow from the loose canvas of the topsail, which dashed the former against the bulwarks, and sent the axe flying from his hand overboard. He picked himself up, and went to help Matt, who was badly bruised and shaken.

"Is there another axe, Matt?" he shouted in his ear.

"No," replied Matt. "I lost the head of the other, day before yesterday, and forgot to get a new one."

"Reckon that settles us," decided the captain gloomily. "I'd better tell those fellows in the hold the worst at once. Let's see how the pumps are."

He climbed over the wreckage to Mark and John, and learned that the water had made a further gain of four or five inches. Then he descended the forecabin and rapped on the bulkhead with a marlinspike. Noel was close to the knot-hole, and answered the summons.

"Hoy!" bawled the captain, "I've bad news for you. The key of the hatch-bar's lost. That's why I was chopping at the hatch before the last smash. But now there's five ton of wreckage jammed across the hatches, and our axe has gone overboard. How much water have you in the hold?"

"About a foot on an even keel. Any chance of going ashore before we founder?"

"Can't say. We must have made a lot of lee-way, and the wind's dead on shore. But it's too dark to see ahead,

and I don't know within twenty miles where we are—that's the truth. The devil of it is, we're so short-handed. The guard's knocked to pieces, and we five can't be all pumping."

The voice ceased, and the prisoners were left to their own imaginings again. Gwynett and Noel leaned against the sheathing in their old place, with the water up to their knees, as it was impossible to keep a footing on the upper part of the sloping floor. After a time Gwynett remarked,

"Let us have a light again. We need not trouble ourselves about our jailers now."

"If the rope is not under water," said Noel.

Luckily the torch of rope had been left high and dry on the top of the heap of canvas, and with some considerable difficulty it was relighted. This was done quite close to the ship's side, near where Gwynett was leaning. The light fell upon the timbers, and lit up two large letters, which had been cut deeply into the wood about four feet from the floor of the hold. They were the initials

M. D.

Gwynett looked at them at first uncomprehendingly. Then he started, as a long-forgotten incident flashed into his memory, and he bent over to his companion's ear.

"Noel," he said, pointing to the letters, "we are saved!"

"Saved?"

"Yes. I'll get you all out of this hold in two minutes."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Between ourselves, my dear fellow, this ship is no more the *Royal Mary* than it is Noah's Ark. It is the *Fleur de Lys* I have told you about. I cut those letters myself years ago, at Calais."

"The *Fleur de Lys*! Then there is that secret door between the hold and the lazarette?"

"That is it."

Gwynett turned to the rest of the prisoners, and said,

"Every man pick up whatever weapon he can lay his hand upon, and follow me. Forward!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DECK OF THE "ROYAL MARY."

THE sound and the shock of the fallen maintopmast had reached the abbé in the cabin. But his wish to know what had happened was overcome by his fear that the prisoners might by this time have been enabled to come on deck, and he therefore preferred to remain in his sanctuary. In his gloom and disappointment, intensified to sullen mania by his potations, the progress of the storm remained almost forgotten by him, and he was only half-conscious of the pitching of the vessel and the uproar of the elements without. He kept his seat at the table, and addressed himself to his bottle. When the latter was at length empty, he flung it savagely into the farthest corner of the cabin, and sat with his elbows on the table and his face resting on his hands. His eyes were fixed on vacancy, and from time to time his lips parted to give utterance to some disconnected mutterings. A feeble light came from the swinging brass lamp suspended from the ceiling over the table, and the shadows from the lamp-bars passed weirdly backward and forward across the panels of the sleeping-cabin partition.

The abbé sat facing one of the narrow doors in the partition nearest the stern on the port side. His glaring eyes turned unthinkingly to the brass handle of the door, shaped in the pattern of a fist holding a bar, and he saw it move slowly round. The movement attracted his attention in a confused fashion, and he stared at the handle with a certain wondering curiosity.

The door opened, but with no sound that could be heard above the roar of the tempest, and a man's form was seen against the pitchy blackness of the recess behind. The newcomer stooped slightly to pass under the low door-head, and his face was lost in the shadow of his hat. Then his head was raised again, the lamplight fell upon his features, and Gaultier recognized Ambrose Gwynett.

The surroundings of the cabin faded away from the abbé's vision. He sat rigid and paralyzed, hearing nothing and seeing nothing but the terrible apparition of the man he had murdered.

"That demon again!" he breathed silently to himself.

A second face came into view alongside Gwynett's, and the abbé recognized this, too, in its turn.

"Noel Wray!" he muttered. "'Twas no affair of his. This must be some damnable dream. What! more phantoms?"

Silently the Jacobite prisoners emerged one by one from the darkness of the sleeping-cabin, and formed a group round the abbé. Then a murmur of words reached his ear as one of the newcomers leaned forward eagerly and pointed at him with his finger.

"The French deserter who betrayed us!"

A circle of faces, with eyes gleaming hatred and vengeance, were bent upon the abbé as he sat at the table spell-bound and powerless, unable even to shrink back from the accusing hand.

Noel, with a start of surprise, recognized the abbé at once.

"Why!" he cried, "it is M. Gaultier!"

In Gwynett's mind a crowd of vague reminiscences, aroused by the sight of the rigid figure before him, were struggling to attain form and substance. Then with a flash the missing memory returned.

"I know him now," he said to Noel. "It is the man of the 'Crown and Anchor,' the scoundrel who set me on fire at the presbytery!"

He turned to the foremost Jacobites, and said,

"Secure him, my men. I have accounts of my own to settle with him afterwards."

The abbé, only now beginning to realize that he was amongst the living and not the dead, was promptly tied hand and foot with a piece of rope, and placed on the floor of one of the sleeping-cabins. The other berths were seen to be empty, and after unlocking the main cabin-door, the party emerged upon the deck of the schooner.

Captain Kermode had been trying to persuade the three ladies to leave the poop and avail themselves of the shelter of the cabin. Avice preferred to remain where she was.

But madam Rostherne, who was almost unconscious from terror and exposure, allowed Muriel and the captain to assist her down the staircase to the main deck.

Before they could reach to the cabin-door it was opened from within, and a string of men issued from it. The captain, who was supporting madam Rostherne in his arms, nearly dropped his burden when his eyes fell upon the foremost figure.

"Lord ha' mercy on us!" he ejaculated in awe-stricken tones. "It's all up, marm. Our time's come—nothing for it but to say our prayers!"

A scream died away on Muriel's lips as she grasped the captain's arm convulsively.

"What—what is it?" she gasped.

"Squire's ghost, marm," responded the captain, trembling. "Come to warn us, marm. Sorter kind of him, isn't it? He was always a good sort, was the squire."

For a moment Muriel's eyes, fixed upon Gwynett's face as it was turned to her in the moonlight, dilated with an awful fear. Then, with a wild cry, she bounded forward and was clasped in her lover's arms.

"Ambrose! Ambrose!"

"Good heavens; you here, Muriel?"

"You live! it is you—you, Ambrose?"

"Yes, sweetheart—I myself."

Noel had leaped up the staircase to Avise, whom he saw leaning in amazement over the poop-rail, and the captain, in ungallant forgetfulness, allowed madam Rostherne to sink helplessly to the deck.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he ejaculated. "Is it really you, squire?"

"As you see, captain," replied Gwynett, extending his hand.

The captain took it rather gingerly.

"And you're not dead?" he asked with considerable suspicion. "Honor bright?"

"Not I."

"H'm!" muttered the captain. "'Born to be hanged, never drown,' seems a good proverb—it does. And how the blazes did you all get out of that hold?" he asked suddenly.

"Explanations had better wait, captain," replied Gwy-

nett. "Let us see to the ship first—my companions here will bear a hand at anything you can put them to."

"Ay, ay. They can man the pumps for us, and that's something. You'll attend to the ladies, squire." And the captain, raising madam Rostherne from the deck, led her with some difficulty to the cabin.

The condition of the vessel was now the paramount concern of everyone. The Jacobites, at a word from Gwynett and Noel, placed themselves under the captain's orders. A strong gang set to work with the utmost vigor at the pumps, and the rest assisted in clearing away the wreck of the topmast and heaving it overboard. The two girls were recommended to remain in the cabin, and madam Rostherne, who had somewhat recovered from her faintness, was glad to keep to the same shelter. As it happened, the near presence of the abbé in *durance vile* had not been mentioned to them, and in the toil and excitement of the efforts to save the schooner the circumstance was for the time forgotten.

It was now long past midnight. The storm had apparently reached its height, and was, if anything, abating in violence. The pumps, worked by a full complement of willing hands, were beginning to reduce the water to a safer level, and the ship was already riding more easily from the removal of the load of wreckage on deck. But the gleams of lightning and the accompanying thunder grew steadily in frequency and nearness, and deluges of spray still swept over the decks from the mountainous masses of the sea.

As the night wore on, the wind fell rapidly, and the ship rolled and pitched on a comparatively smooth swell. The canopy of inky cloud was riven with incessant flashes of lightning, and at times the schooner seemed enveloped in a network of blinding radiance, while the crash and roll of the thunder went on almost without a break. The three ladies, less alarmed by the lightning than they had been by the storm, refused to be any longer imprisoned in the cabin, and came out again upon the main deck. A place of comparative shelter was found for them near the fore-castle, and from this refuge they waited for the long-desired dawn.

Gwynett had in the meantime been taking a hand at the

wheel. On being relieved later by the captain, he asked him if he could form any idea as to their position.

"Well, squire," was the reply, "the wind's clean gone round since ten o'clock. I reckoned then as we might be a dozen miles southwest of Portland Bill. We've been drifting down Channel ever since, and all I can say is, we haven't struck on Start Point yet."

"Twice lately I have fancied I saw a headland to the north, when the lightning came low on the horizon."

"Might be the Start, might be Holt Head," replied the captain. "I reckon you're as wise as I am, squire, till we can see something. What I don't like is this lightning. We've a little powder in my cabin, and a dozen kegs in the afterhold—and I wish it was on shore or at the bottom of the sea."

The captain had scarcely spoken when the whole stern of the ship was bathed in one vast sheet of blinding light, accompanied by so deafening a detonation that for a moment half the ship's company took it for granted the schooner had blown up. Two of the Kermodes sprang upon the poop, and found the captain lying by the wreck of the wheel and binnacle, blackened and unconscious, but still breathing. Gwynett had been dashed violently against the bulwark and partially stunned, but had otherwise had an almost miraculous escape.

With the exception of a considerable tearing up of the poop-deck by the thunderbolt, no damage seemed to have been done to the ship. But she was now deprived of her steering gear and unmanageable, and could only be allowed to drift heavily before the wind.

Captain Kermode was carried by his brothers to the main deck, and Gwynett, who was not long in recovering from his fall, superintended the efforts made to restore him to consciousness. But in the midst of these a loud shout from some of the Jacobites drew attention to a new disaster. Volumes of smoke were beginning to rise from the poop, and a moment later flames were seen issuing from the riven poop-deck. The schooner had been set on fire by the lightning.

The wind was dead astern at this juncture, and the ship was promptly enveloped in acrid clouds which made everything invisible. By the exercise of great dexterity and re-

source the four brothers succeeded after an interval in getting the schooner's head a little more to the wind, and the smoke was thus carried to leeward. The whole cabin front was now in a blaze, and the flames, leaping and roaring, lit up the ship as if it were day.

Suddenly a voice came from among the Jacobites,

"Lads, we've forgotten the Frenchman!"

Gwynett started, for the recent turn of events had driven the abbé from his recollection.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "the fellow will be burnt alive. We must get him out."

A chorus of shouts rose in answer.

"Not possible, squire! look at the flames—and he's bound to be done for already, either by the fire, or the smoke."

"I think they are right," put in Noel. "The cabin must have been full of smoke before it burst out."

Gwynett looked round. Evidently no one of the Jacobites was in the least disposed to run a frightful risk on the remote chance of saving the man who had betrayed them to the gallows. The Kermode brothers might possibly have done something at the exhortation of the captain, had he been able or willing to suggest an attempt at rescue. But he was still unconscious, and none of the brothers made a movement.

"He must be rescued," cried Gwynett. "But for us, he would have escaped easily. Whatever the man may be, we have no right to burn him alive. Find me a rope!"

While Luke Kermode obeyed this order, Gwynett bounded to the corner in the bows where Muriel and her two companions were crouching under the shelter of the bulwarks. In half a dozen words he explained to her the frightful position of Gaultier, and the duty cast upon him of attempting a rescue. Muriel knew him better than to seek to dissuade him, deep as were the wrongs that both had suffered at the hands of the imprisoned man, and she only clasped him more closely when she received what she felt might be his last kiss.

Then he rushed back to the main deck, and took the rope which Luke held out ready for him.

"My dear fellow," remonstrated Noel, "it is next door to certain death——"

"It is certain death to leave him there," returned Gwynett, "and it was I who ordered him to be bound. Hold the rope taut, and if I stay too long pull me back through the doorway—that is if the rope lasts long enough."

Turning a deaf ear to all protests, Gwynett secured the rope round his waist, and put one of the sailors' clasp-knives between his teeth. Then he held his cloak, which was soaked with wet, before him as a sort of shield, and advanced to the door of the cabin. Seizing an opportunity when the flames swept a little to one side, he made a dash at the doorway, dropped on his hands and knees with the wet cloak completely covering him, and disappeared into the cabin.

Noel and Matt advanced as near as possible to the flames, holding the rope taut as Gwynett in his progress drew it from between their hands. For a second or two after he had vanished into the roaring vortex of smoke and fire the rope continued to be pulled forwards. Then the tension ceased, and for an interval the two men waited for a sign.

Presently the rope was slightly dragged, and fell slack again. Then there came a couple of sharp tugs. The watchers took these as a signal to draw back the rope, which was already smoking in the furious heat far outside the cabin door. The increased strain showed that a double burden was being borne by the rope, and everyone expected momentarily that it would be burnt through. Then, amidst shouts of relief, a black mass partly on fire was seen at the cabin door. That instant the rope parted. But half a dozen men sprang forward, and the prostrate form of Gwynett, clasping the abbé in his arms, was hauled from out of the very edge of the flames.

A vigorous cheer rang through the air as Gwynett, blackened and almost suffocated, staggered to one knee and freed himself from the smouldering cloak which covered him. The abbé, who was instantly set loose from his bonds, lay partly unconscious or stupefied. But in a couple of minutes the cold air and the splash of spray upon his face revived him, and he opened his eyes. Then with the aid of Luke Kermode he staggered to his feet and looked wildly round upon the bystanders.

Opposite to him, Gwynett was standing supported by Muriel and Noel Wray, while around were grouped the ten



Jacobites. He swept the hair back from his forehead, and leaned heavily upon Luke Kermode.

"I was in the cabin, suffocating," he muttered, half to himself. "Who saved me?"

Half a dozen hands pointed to Gwynett.

The abbé started, and he clutched his throat as his glaring eyes fixed themselves upon Gwynett.

"No! not you!" he gasped.

"It was I."

"Ambrose Gwynett—alive!"

"I am Ambrose Gwynett."

"Then it was you—you—I saw at St. Malo?"

"I was at St. Malo."

The abbé staggered, and flung his arms aloft with a cry of superstitious terror.

"Four times!" he gasped hoarsely, "four times this demon has escaped me! And now——!"

He flashed round upon Muriel and Gwynett, his features distorted with jealousy and undying hatred, and shrieked in his rescuer's face,

"What! to be saved by you! never—by all the devils! never!"

He reeled back with a strangled curse, turned suddenly, and sprang at a bound into the wall of smoke and flame that swept round the staircase. A couple of seconds later his tall form could be seen on the high poop-deck close to the railing, silhouetted in black against the tongues of fire that writhed upwards from the burning cabins, and with one clenched fist raised with a last imprecation and defiance. Then, with a wild cry, he flung himself backwards into the roaring gulf of flame behind him, and disappeared.

The next instant a deafening explosion came from the captain's cabin, a spout of fire shot up heavenwards, and the poop of the schooner was blown in a thousand fragments to the winds and the ocean.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ON SHORE.

IT was on a Wednesday afternoon that Randolph Dorrington, accompanied by his Plymouth lawyer and Coverdale, set out from the "Three Tuns" to return to the home which he had not seen for two-and-twenty years.

Through the information furnished by Mr. Wrottesley, whom he had visited before calling upon the duke of Marlborough at Holywell, he was now aware of most of the events that had followed the supposed murder at the "Crown and Anchor." The respective journeys of both Gwynett and Noel Wray to Scotland, in connection with the Jacobite rising, were of course known to the Canterbury lawyer.

Two letters from Gwynett to Dorrington of widely separated dates, left in charge of the host of Will's Coffee House, had been duly handed over by the landlord when Dorrington visited the tavern on his last arrival in England. It was while receiving them that Coverdale, who also used the tavern and happened to be present at the time, heard Dorrington's name mentioned by the landlord. Being a sufficiently uncommon one to suggest further inquiry, it was soon ascertained by Coverdale that the newcomer was in truth the long-lost father of whom he had heard so much, and he forthwith introduced himself.

That Dorrington had been Gwynett's companion at the "Crown and Anchor" he had some time previously learned from a casual meeting with Mr. Wrottesley, and he now promptly volunteered to use his rather considerable influence with the postmaster-general and his other friends in the government to obtain a formal pardon for Ambrose Gwynett. An invitation to Dorrington Hall had resulted from the meeting, and hence the appearance of the two gentlemen at the "Three Tuns" as already detailed to the reader.

The coast roads of the period being exceedingly indifferent, the party from Plymouth had travelled by the Exeter mail route as far as Totnes, where they spent the night. Early the next morning they resumed their journey by the cross-country road to Dorrington Hall, and reached it in the course of the afternoon of Thursday.

At the squire's home an unexpected reception awaited him.

The news of his arrival at Plymouth had come to the ears of a Halcombe farmer's son who happened to be in the town on some business, and this youth, returning home on horseback on the Wednesday, had spread the surprising news all the way from Yealmpton to Kingsbridge. When therefore Dorrington's carriage and post-horses drove up to the Hall, half the population of the district had assembled to witness the arrival, and the squire was the recipient of quite an elaborate ovation. This was perhaps none the less enthusiastic on account of the mystery which had for the last three or four years surrounded the affairs of the Wray family, often occupants of the Hall, and of the squire's daughter herself.

As to this, very little enlightenment seemed to be forthcoming, for neither Wrottesley nor Coverdale had news to offer respecting any of the absentees, and the Wray family lawyers in London had apparently given no information on the subject to their Plymouth correspondents.

The member of the latter firm who accompanied Dorrington, and whose name was Tidcombe, was able to point out to him the larger number of the actual tenants of the manor in the crowd which gathered to meet the squire, and these were introduced in due course. Dorrington inquired about the remainder of the persons present.

"Farmers about the district on other estates chiefly," replied Mr. Tidcombe. "Except the sailor-looking fellows, who are mostly fishermen."

"When they are not smugglers," remarked Dorrington, who had not forgotten the early associations of his home.

"I take it they are usually both," replied the lawyer.

"And all of them are wreckers when they get the chance, especially since there has been, for so many years, no lord of the manor to put in a claim to flotsam and jetsam."

"I never sued to meddle with that," said Dorrington,

“so long as they played no tricks. But once or twice I had to show my teeth when the crews were not well treated after they managed to get ashore.”

When the party were under the roof of the Hall, which had been made fairly comfortable in anticipation of their arrival, inquiries were made about provisions, and on the strength of the reply a supper for the manor tenantry was forthwith ordered. The evening was accordingly devoted to the rough and ready festivities improvised for the occasion, and at the close of these it was announced that on the following morning the squire would receive all comers on business connected with their holdings on the estate.

Both Dorrington and the lawyer expected a fairly full attendance of tenants in the morning, to make representations of one sort or another respecting rentals or tenures. They were therefore a good deal surprised when at nine o'clock the great Hall was found to be graced by the single presence of an old woman, who was deaf and nearly blind and had nothing particular to say. An explanation of the non-attendance of others was shortly forthcoming in the news that a ship was on the rocks not far from Holt Head, and that all the able-bodied population of the place had gone down to await her breaking up, and the arrival of the fragments on shore.

As Dorrington and his guests had by this time finished their breakfast, they decided to ride off to the scene of the wreck, which was within easy distance of the Hall, and learn if anything had transpired as to the fate of the crew.

On arriving at the rock-bound shore, the wreck, which showed signs of having been on fire, was at once visible.

The blackened hull lay firmly wedged between two rocks, separated from the beach by rather more than half a mile of breakers, and frequently hidden from the hundred or more of spectators by the clouds of spray dashed over it by a stiff breeze from the southeast.

At the moment no one was visible upon the deck. But it was said that several persons had been caught sight of from time to time, and that they were apparently sheltering within the fore-castle or hold of the vessel. On inquiry it appeared that the wreck had been first seen at about

eight o'clock that morning, when the tide was within an hour of the full.

It was now ten o'clock, the ebb was running out fast, and it was likely that before low tide was reached the ship—it if held together so long—would be nearly accessible on foot over the sand and bare rocks.

Dorrington sent back to the Hall for a supply of dry clothes, food, and stimulants, and ordered two or three vehicles to be in readiness on the beach.

As the morning passed the wind fell with the ebb of the tide, and at noon the spectators could get within a few hundred yards of the wreck. A score of people, including three women, could be plainly seen upon her decks, and this circumstance seemed to create a little dissatisfaction among two or three old 'longshoremen who formed a group not far from the squire.

"I recollect that old shark," said he to Coverdale, pointing at one of the little knot. "There were one or two queer stories about his treatment of bodies that came ashore—bodies, I mean, that had a certain amount of life in them."

"Murdered?" asked Coverdale, lifting his eyebrows.

"There or thereabouts," replied Dorington. "Some of these people think it a grievance for anyone to survive a wreck long enough to claim anything. One can't knock it out of their heads that a wreck occurs specially for their benefit. But I shall make it my business to see that there is no plundering of crew or passengers. Well, Yeo?" he called out to the principal subject of his remarks.

"Morning, squire!" responded the person addressed, in a non-committal tone.

"The crew there look pretty healthy, so far, Yeo?"

Yeo uttered a dissatisfied grunt, and turned the quid in his cheek.

"Too many to knock on the head quietly, eh?"

The man looked under his brows at the squire, but said nothing.

"And too lively to roll over into a little pool of water, eh, Yeo?"

"Who's talking of all that?" asked the man sullenly.

"I know who's thinking of it," replied the squire. "And

it'll have to stop at thinking, Yeo. Mark that, you and your mates there."

Yeo and his friends received this remark with an air of injured innocence, and presently went about hinting darkly that the squire's much-hailed return was going to be a bad job for honest people.

In the meantime, with the fall of the wind and the tide, the water around the wreck had become practicable for swimmers. A couple of the crew were seen to be about to leave the ship, and presently they slipped over the side, to make their way with energetic strokes to the nearest point of the beach.

The squire and Coverdale walked their horses into the water to meet them, and great was the amazement of the former to recognize, in one of the swimmers, his intended son-in-law, Ambrose Gwynett.

But this was nothing to the discovery that his daughter, alive and well, was on board the wreck, and in her company the sister from whom he had been parted almost since his childhood. The news spread amongst the crowd, and a tremendous cheer echoed from the cliffs to the distant hull on the reefs.

It was arranged that with the help of hatchets promptly furnished by the shoremen, a raft should be made by the ship's crew, on which, without waiting for the arrival of boats from Halcombe, the passengers could be landed from the wreck. A dozen Halcombe sailors accompanied Gwynett and Luke Kermode back to the hull to lend a hand at the putting together of the raft, and after a very short interval the three ladies were by its aid transferred to the beach. Dorrington advanced into the sea to meet them, and the father and daughter, who had four years before met so strangely at Wray Cottage, were by a still stranger fate again reunited.

Avice and Coverdale, meeting for the first time since the latter's departure on the midnight ride to Maidstone, exchanged friendly greetings, and Gwynett warmly tendered his thanks to the contractor for his good offices on that unfortunate expedition.

The wind had now sunk to a gentle breeze, the June sun shone brightly, and the weather promised to remain fine. The Kermodes were still on the wreck, the captain having



recovered consciousness, but being still a good deal shaken by the effects of the lightning-stroke.

While the ladies were being despatched in a carriage to the Hall, Gwynett took Dorrington aside and informed him of his discovery that the so-called *Royal Mary* was in reality the *Fleur de Lys*, and asked his assistance to keep the affair secret for a day or two.

"This business requires a good deal of explanation," he remarked, "and we may have some difficulty in getting any at all. But from all I could see in passing through the lazarette, the sheathing has never been disturbed since I left it, and if so the thirty-two chests of treasure are still there—whoever their owner may be."

"Did not the explosion expose them to view?"

"No. To all appearance it acted vertically, and the sides of the ship are not much affected. In fact, the explosion rather helped to put an end to the fire for us, as most of the burning timbers were blown into the sea. We struck ten minutes afterwards, and a heavy surf broke over us till dawn. That and the rain extinguished what was left of the flames."

"Well, what is to be done now?"

"We must at all hazards delay the ship being broken up by these people till the chests are removed. I take it they will look upon the wreck as their legitimate property, after the custom of these parts?"

"Yes. But I daresay I can arrange a delay without exciting any suspicion. The chests themselves are the real difficulty—we must prevent the slightest idea of their value getting about. Unluckily their weight can hardly fail to attract attention."

Dorrington exchanged a few words with Mr. Tidcombe, went back amongst the crowd, and gathered the people in a circle around him.

"My men," he said, "this ship, the *Royal Mary*, belongs to his majesty the king for this voyage, being chartered by his majesty's servants from Plymouth to London. But it is a total wreck, and I, as lord of the manor and justice of the peace, am responsible to the owners for their rights. In the meantime, you may take whatever comes ashore, and after three days I will allow the ship to be broken up. I understand there is no cargo except a few boxes of mercury,

which are of no use to any of you. But for these boxes I shall be responsible to the owners—that is if they can be got ashore—and I must set a guard over the hull till that is done. Everything else you shall be welcome to, even if I have to buy it myself for you.”

This speech and the suggested arrangements were received with complete satisfaction, and the squire proceeded straightway to swear in half a dozen of the most prominent and capable tenants as special constables to keep watch and ward over the wreck till further notice.

The next question that arose had reference to the Jacobite prisoners.

Whatever expectations Gwynett and Noel might entertain of having their presence amongst the rebel forces condoned, this in no way applied to their fellow-captives, and neither of them were disposed to assist in handing over the unfortunate ten to the hangman. By Gwynett's advice the prisoners remained for the present with their two jailers on the wreck, and Dorrington, in order to avoid being appealed to for his official assistance by the corporal of the guard, returned to the Hall. From there he presently sent back to Gwynett a stock of provisions, a bag containing thirty pounds in gold and silver, and a small keg of spirits.

These were conveyed on board, and a much-needed meal partaken of by those on the wreck. The money was secretly distributed amongst the prisoners by Gwynett, and the keg was offered to the corporal and his colleague.

This primitive diplomacy secured all that was desired. The corporal had not ventured to ask any assistance from the shoremen in securing his prisoners, and was relieved at finding the latter made no attempt to escape. He accordingly proceeded to do justice to the liquor which was so conveniently forthcoming. As a result, the Jacobites, by twos and threes, got ashore quite unnoticed. They then separated according to the recommendations given them by Gwynett, set off on the way to their homes in different parts of the country, and were no more seen.

Later in the day the Kermodes were invited to go to the Hall to be accommodated for the night, and took with them the two now hopelessly inebriated soldiers. Seeing that the forecastle was secure from pillage, the captain carried

ashore with him nothing but the ship's papers, to which he always clung with very much the same feeling that binds a regiment to its colors.

The invitation had arisen out of a discussion between the five gentlemen at the Hall as to the circumstances under which the *Fleur de Lys* had come to masquerade under the name of the *Royal Mary*, and it seemed likely that a certain amount of diplomacy would be needed to extract a complete explanation of their share in the transaction from the captain and his half-brothers. With this in view, some suitable steps for securing the desired result were arranged for the following day, and the party retired to rest at an early hour.

Next morning the Kermodes, after being regaled with a good breakfast, were told that they would be seen by the squire as soon as he was at liberty. Presently they were summoned for the purpose, and followed a servant down a long stone passage. A heavy oaken door at the end of this was unlocked, and the party were ushered into a room beyond. A long high-backed bench against a wall was pointed out to them, they were requested to be seated, and the servant retired, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE JUSTICE-ROOM AT DORRINGTON.

THE captain and his half-brothers looked round the room, which had no occupants except themselves, and found its aspect very far from genial.

It was lofty, panelled in black oak, and dimly lit by two small windows rather high up in the wall opposite the bench. In front of the Kermodes, and under the windows, was a raised dais on which stood a table and three chairs—the latter high-backed and somewhat elaborately carved.

On the floor in front of the dais was a smaller table with its chair, while before these was a low railing extending half across the room, and supported at each end by a thick oak newel-post. Each table was furnished with paper, writing materials, and a heap of old leather-bound volumes.

In the walls to the right and left of the dais were two heavy doors, one on each side, the door by which the Kermodes had entered being in the wall opposite the dais. The room was in fact one which had been used for the administration of justice by generations of county magistrates of the house of Dorrington.

The Kermodes sat for two or three minutes in silence, exchanging from time to time curious and not altogether satisfied glances. Then the door to the right of the dais opened and Dorrington entered, followed by Coverdale and the Plymouth lawyer. Both the former took their places on the dais, in two of the high-backed chairs, and the lawyer seated himself before the smaller table in front of them.

These proceedings, which were watched with profound attention by the captain, connected themselves with certain reminiscences of his early life, and after a prolonged stare at the two figures on the dais, he murmured in Matt's ear,

“Beaks, Matt! Beaks, by the Lord!”

The half-brothers passed this suggestion in a warning whisper from one to the other, and sat straight up in their places to await developments.

The lawyer now stood up, with a large sheet of blue paper in his hand, and read out from it in a mechanical tone,

"This court, held before Randolph Dorrington and John Coverdale, esquires, two of his majesty's justices of the peace for the counties of Devon and York respectively, is assembled to inquire into the loss of the schooner known as the *Royal Mary*, chartered by certain of his majesty's servants for a voyage between Plymouth and London, and wrecked near Holt Head, in the said county of Devon, on the morning of the 6th of June in this year of grace 1716."

This exordium relieved the captain's mind somewhat, and he pulled his forelock as the lawyer sat down.

"That's all right and proper," he whispered to Matt, as he leaned back and waited with a placid countenance for the next stage of the proceedings.

The two justices put their heads together, and held an inaudible conference for a minute. Then Dorrington, in tones which struck the captain a little uncomfortably, announced,

"The court decides to postpone this part of the inquiry, in order to proceed with the next business."

The lawyer rose again with a second paper in his hand.

"The first count," he read aloud, "charges Christopher Kermode, master mariner, and four others, to wit, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John Kermode, with being in unlawful possession of a certain ship, to wit, the *Fleur de Lys*, formerly of Marseilles."

At these words the captain suddenly sat bolt upright, uncrossed his legs, and stared with wide-open eyes at the lawyer.

"The second count," proceeded the latter, "charges the said five persons with stealing the said ship at some time and place unknown. The third count charges the said five persons with piracy on the high seas in connection with the said ship *Fleur de Lys* at some date unknown. The fourth count charges the said five persons with having falsely, and with intent to defraud the owner of the said

ship *Fleur de Lys*, reported that it had foundered at sea in the month of December, 1711."

The captain listened to these accusations with a stunned expression of countenance. After a pause, he slowly turned round to his half-brothers, and found their four pairs of eyes fixed upon his own with a look of despairing appeal. Then he faced round again, rubbed his hands up and down his knees, and muttered in a dazed aside,

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

The lawyer put down the paper, settled his gold spectacles severely on his nose, and asked,

"Do the prisoners respectively plead guilty or not guilty?"

The captain's acquaintance with the principles and procedure of the criminal law was too limited to suggest any want of regularity in what was going on, and he therefore took it for granted that the proposed alternative was one that could not be evaded. He knew that upon his initiative would depend the action of his half-brothers, and the responsibility of a decision weighed rather heavily upon him. He scratched his head in deep thought, and gazed more than once at the little windows in the search for inspiration. Finally, after a glance at the four brothers which was intended to assure them that he was making the best of a very bad job, he cleared his throat, and replied.

"We plead not guilty, your worships. But, to tell you the truth, I guess we did it all—more or less, as you may say."

The three inquisitors had some little difficulty in preserving their solemnity of visage at this point. But, after a little pause, Dorrington remarked,

"Before calling witnesses to prove the charges made against you, the court is willing to hear your own account of the matters in question—if you are disposed to give one. While reminding you that you are not at all bound to criminate yourself, the court at the same time informs you that a full confession will probably influence it in your favor, subject to the requirements of justice."

It appeared to the captain that, after making a general admission of guilt, inaccuracy of detail would be straining at a gnat after swallowing a camel. He therefore decided

to make a clean breast of all the matters within his knowledge.

"Your honors are welcome to the whole yarn," he replied; adding, modestly, "if your honors won't find it too long."

"The court will listen to you," said Dorrington. "Let Mr. Ambrose Gwynett be asked to be present."

The lawyer rose, passed out of one of the side doors, and returned with Gwynett, who was forthwith invited to occupy the third chair on the dais.

"Proceed with your statement, captain Kermode," said Dorrington.

The captain's memory was sufficiently retentive to enable him to give a fairly correct account of the circumstances under which he had, at the behest of the duke of Marlborough, undertaken to navigate the *Fleur de Lys* from Ostend to London, and he brought down his story to the point of his arrival at Scheveningen to await the convoy of the *Mermaid* to England.

"Whose name was given you as the owner of the *Fleur de Lys*?" asked Dorrington.

"Your worship, we never properly knew. If the duke told me, it must have gone out of my head at once. But I reckon he didn't. You see when he promised to convoy me to London——"

"Did he offer that, or did you ask?"

"I asked, your worship."

"Go on."

"Well, your worship, I took no account of the owner's name, because I expected to be in the duke's company to England, and I reckoned he'd let his friends know when to claim the ship. 'Twasn't as if I could go and fetch 'em."

Dorrington signed to Kermode to wait a moment, and whispered aside to Gwynett.

"Does this throw any light on the question of the treasure?"

"On the contrary, I am more in the dark than before. Let him finish his story."

"Go on, captain Kermode," said Dorrington.

"Well, your worship," resumed the captain, with a little more hesitation than he had hitherto shown, "so far I

reckon everything was fair and square. But when I got back from seeing Mr. Cardonnel at the Hague, and was a-sitting at my usual house-of-call—the ‘Prinz van Oranj’—and smoking by myself, who should turn up but my four half-brothers here.”

“Ay! ay!” murmured the four brothers assentingly.

“Born and bred at Nantucket, your worships, and owners of the *Royal Mary*, schooner. They’d lost the schooner in the Channel, and been cast away down the coast with nothing but what they stood up in.”

“Nothing,” grunted Matt.

“Well, your worship, seeing as none of ’em could speak a word of any foreign lingo, my first notion was to give ’em a passage to London. Then afterwards the notion came into my head that the *Fleur de Lys* was kinder providentially suited to ’em, and it would be clear waste of a good chance to let it slip.”

At this point it seemed to occur to the captain that the ethical side of his proposition required a little bolstering up, and he proceeded,

“You see, your worship, I’ve sorter dry-nursed these four lads since they were babbies, and it was borne in upon me as it was my duty to give ’em a fresh start in life again. By bad luck, I was in low water myself just then—lost a handy little lugger a month afore that—and hadn’t a shot in the locker.”

The captain paused, in the hope that his views of family duty might elicit some expression of sympathy from the court. None, however, was forthcoming, and he resumed his narrative with rather a depressed air.

“To make a long story short, your worship, I got a few stores together to do the trick with. One of ’em was a figgerhead of a kinder angel I found in an old ship-yard, and I got the fellow to chop its wings off and clap a crown on its head to stand for the *Royal Mary*. I hocussed some drink for the Dutch crew, and they never saw my brothers come aboard. We let the *Mermaid* get out of sight, and steered north till next morning. Then we put the Dutchies ashore, all as drunk as boiled owls, and started to transmogrify the *Fleur de Lys* into the *Royal Mary* as was lost. We put the new figgerhead on, fitted a new pair of headboards with a new name on, and painted her inside and

out a different color. Then we ran into Hamburg, and changed her rig from a brig to a schooner."

The captain paused a moment, as if trying to recollect the next stage of his history, and Matt whispered in his ear. The captain nodded, and resumed,

"Ay, ay. You see, your worship, my brothers here had saved their ship's papers when they were cast away, and they served all right for the *Fleur de Lys*—there was nobody to know any difference. Then we put to sea again and made for Deal, and I went to London to tell the duke as how the *Fleur de Lys* had caught fire and foundered at sea, and all the crew had been saved by my four half-brothers on board their own schooner, the *Royal Mary* of Nantucket, and as how they'd put the Dutchmen ashore on the Texel."

"What did the duke say?" inquired Gwynett rather curiously.

"Very little, squire—'lucky there was no lives lost,' or words to that effect."

Dorrington exchanged a glance with Gwynett, and then nodded to Kermode to go on.

"Well, your worship, squire Gwynett has seen the schooner more nor once, and he knows we've been making an honest living ever since."

"After a fashion, captain Kermode," remarked Gwynett, keeping a serious countenance. "It depends upon the view his majesty's government would take of your business at St. Malo last November."

"Good Lord, squire!" exclaimed the captain, in rather an alarmed tone, "you don't reckon it's my business to ask questions of my passengers, do you? or get myself into hot water by spying out their private concerns?"

"A good dead depends upon circumstances, captain," replied Gwynett gravely.

"Well, sir," asked Dorrington, "what next?"

"That's about all, your worship—I've made a clean breast of it. I reckon your worships will not be hard on a man as tried to do his duty to his family. Four good lads left without father or mother, and orphans, so to speak."

The last phrase of his speech seemed to strike the captain as having a certain argumentative value, and he repeated it with much emphasis.

"Yes, your worships—orphans, every one of 'em. Look at 'em!" and he waved his hand towards the brothers as if the fact would be self-evident from their appearance.

The three gentlemen conferred together, and then Dorrington asked,

"When you invented this story of the loss of the *Fleur de Lys*, you knew you would most likely be expected to produce her papers?"

"Yes, your worship. Of course I had only what was given me at Ostend."

"What did you do with them?"

"Kept 'em, your worship—carefully."

"Where are they?"

The captain produced an oil-skin covered package from the inside pocket of his pilot-coat, and proceeded to untie it. He took a couple of papers from the package, and handed them to Dorrington. One of these was the safe-conduct written by Marlborough for the captain when at Eekeren, and the other was a certificate registering the *Fleur de Lys* as of the port of Ostend. In both documents the ship was stated to be owned by Ambrose Gwynett, British subject. Dorrington handed the papers to Gwynett, remarking in an undertone,

"This is more puzzling than ever. You appear to be the consignee of the treasure as well as owner of the vessel."

"That is quite out of the question," replied Gwynett.

Dorrington turned to the captain again.

"You said you knew nothing of the owner of the *Fleur de Lys*?"

"Nothing, your worship."

"The owner is mentioned in both these papers."

"Likely enough, your worship. But I can't read—none of us can."

"Why didn't you ask someone to read the papers for you?"

"There was never any call for it, your worship. And we couldn't tell whether it mightn't be awkward. I got my orders from the duke, and I reported to the duke. He never told me to go to anybody else."

As the captain had obviously no more to say, Dorrington rose, and addressed the five culprits with magisterial solemnity.

"The court, captain Kermode, has listened to your defence, and taken note of your confession. It amounts virtually to a plea of guilty, for yourself and your four half-brothers, to the several charges in the indictment against you. But the law attaches a different penalty to the four crimes to which you have confessed, and the court has it in its power to choose for which offence you shall receive sentence. For the crime of priacy upon the high seas the law requires that you shall all be hanged, drawn and quartered. For the offences of stealing and being in unlawful possession the penalty is merely that of being hanged. In consideration of your full confession, the court wishes to deal with you as leniently as possible. It therefore acquits you of piracy, and sentences you upon the three minor counts."

The captain's eyes and mouth opened wide at this pronouncement, and he half rose from his seat.

"I don't exactly understand, your worship," he said. "Be we found guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty of fraud, theft, and of unlawful possession. Not guilty of piracy."

"And what's the sentence, your worship?"

"To be hanged, merely—not drawn and quartered."

The five culprits jumped to their feet simultaneously, with horror in their visages.

"But your worship," stammered the captain, "it's all the same thing!"

"It can't be the same thing," explained Dorrington, "or the law would make a difference."

It now began to dawn upon the captain that the proceedings lacked something of regularity, and he bethought him of his rights as a British subject.

"But, your worship," he remonstrated, "this business isn't ship-shape. Where's your jury? We can't be hanged without a jury."

"Of course you can have a jury if you claim one," replied Dorrington. "Only the jury will have to convict you of piracy as well as the other matters, and then you'll be drawn and quartered as well as hanged. If you prefer that, the court will raise no objection."

The captain sank into his seat again, and his gaze wan-

dered round the room with an air of disgust beyond the power of words to express.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he muttered for the second time.

Then his eye fell upon Gwynett, and he asked dolefully,

"Couldn't you put in a word for us, squire? It's hard lines to be hung. And you know we can't expect *your* luck—no offence for mentioning it."

Gwynett was scarcely able to keep his countenance at this delicate allusion on the part of his rescuer.

"Unfortunately, captain," he replied, "I am afraid that if I do it will be compounding a felony. You see it happens that I myself am the owner of the *Fleur de Lys*."

"What's that?" asked the captain, suddenly waking up to this new feature of the case. "The *Fleur de Lys* belongs to *you*, squire?"

"Read the ship's papers, Mr. Clerk," said Dorrington to the lawyer.

The lawyer read aloud the contents of the Ostend certificate and the duke's safe-conduct.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the astonished captain. "And to think we never knew!"

"At the same time, captain," resumed Gwynett, "I think I can see a way out of the difficulty. As the owner of the *Fleur de Lys* it would be my business to prosecute in this case. But I have not yet taken that step. These two gentlemen here can bind me over to prosecute if they choose, but I appeal to them not to do so. Of course, if you and your relatives go away and brag of the affair, justice will have to take its course. But so far, as there is no jury present, no one but ourselves will be any the wiser."

Dorrington bowed gravely to Gwynett, and remarked,

"If Mr. Gwynett does not wish to prosecute, Mr. Coverdale and myself have no objection to let the matter drop. Mr. Clerk, the prisoners are discharged."

"Thank your worship kindly," exclaimed the captain joyfully. The four brothers touched their forelocks with an expression of wonder and relief in their countenances.

"There is no harm, captain Kermode," added Dorrington, "in telling you that you owe this leniency on the part of the court to the service you once rendered to Mr. Gwy-

nett at the cross-roads near Deal—although I am not quite sure whether that was not in itself a little illegal."

"The squire never murdered that chap at the 'Crown and Anchor,' I'll swear," said the captain energetically.

"You are perfectly right, captain," said Dorrington, laughing, "for it happens that *I* was the chap at the 'Crown and Anchor.'"

The captain looked a little incredulous.

"*You*, your worship?"

"It was Mr. Dorrington, captain," remarked Gwynett. "So you may swear with a safe conscience. But for the present, don't swear outside of this room—everybody is not as wise as you are, just yet."

The captain looked from Gwynett to Dorrington and back again.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he soliloquized for the third time.

The three gentlemen on the dais now rose and prepared to leave the room, followed by Mr. Tidcombe. Gwynett waited till his companions had passed out, and then took the opportunity of explaining to the Kermodes the relation in which he stood to Dorrington, and also the means by which the identity of the *Fleur de Lys* with the so-called *Royal Mary* had become known to him.

"It was small wonder I did not know the ship at St. Malo," he added, "for you had altered her beyond recognition. But tell me, captain, what did that unfortunate Frenchman mean by asking me about St. Malo—just before he put an end to himself?"

"Why, you saw him there, squire."

"Not I."

"Certainly you did, squire. He fell into the wherry off the ladder, and hurt himself—just before you started to row back to the shore."

"Was that the man?" asked Gwynett. "I recollect it well." Then he said to himself,

"He recognized me, evidently, and took me for a ghost. It was rather a pity I did not stop to recognize him."

"There was one thing, squire," remarked the captain, "me and my mates have been reckoning you ought to be told. It was that there Frenchman that tried to drown yon in the dinghy the time we're speaking of, at St. Malo."

"Tried to drown me? How?"

"Well, squire, after you had sunk in the harbor that night, Luke here picked up one of the oars of the dinghy that you'd been rowing in. It had the boat's plug tied to it with a piece of twine, and some of the others saw the Frenchman doing something or other to the dinghy just before you stepped into it. I reckon he sorter expected you'd pull the plug out as soon as you shifted the oars to row."

"And why?" asked Gwynett, completely at a loss to explain this piece of malignity.

"Can't say, squire—guess he had his reasons. And I guess his reasons would suit the place he's gone to, d—him!"

The captain pulled his forelock, and took his half-brothers off to follow their own devices on the hull of the wreck.

After a little discussion between Gwynett and Dorrington, it was agreed that the presence of the treasure on board the *Fleur de Lys* had probably remained altogether unsuspected. An examination of the lazarette about noon proved that this must have been the case, for the chests were found exactly as they had been placed by Gwynett when first taken on board in the harbor of San Lucar. It was decided to remove them forthwith to the Hall, and in the course of the day this was done. The excessive weight of the chests was explained by the statement that they contained mercury, in the form of Spanish cinnabar from Almaden, and thus no suspicion of their actual value was aroused.

The chests were placed for security in the strong-room of the Hall, and privately examined by Gwynett and Dorrington. Those of the boxes which it was thought worth while to open were found to contain not silver, as Gwynett had supposed, but gold Spanish pistoles, and the total contents were probably worth a little over a million sterling. After this examination the cases were reinstated in their former condition, and then stowed away in a deep recess in the wall of the strong-room, under lock and key.

The question of the ownership of the treasure was in the meantime the subject of earnest discussion between the two, and Gwynett expressed his conviction that, despite the mystery attaching to the despatch of the *Fleur de Lys* on

her voyage to England from Scheveningen, the gold must still belong of right to the French crown.

"The gift of the ship to me by the king," he remarked to Dorrington, "was a mere compliment, and an after-thought to boot. There was nothing that could in the least suggest this money going with it."

"One would suppose the duke was mixed up with it, if it were not for his treating the ship as your property entirely. What do you propose to do?"

"It is clear the matter must be brought to the notice of the regent. But I doubt very much whether he will know anything about the matter. It is M. de Torcy, if anyone, who holds the key to the mystery. I had better write to him about it."

"Have you a cypher to use in correspondence with him?"

"No. Why?"

"It is an awkward thing to write about, if the letter by any chance went astray, or was tampered with by his political enemies. I suppose he has them, like other folks. For myself, I don't want enterprising people to know that there is a million sterling at Dorrington, only waiting to be stolen. It is a tempting sum. Apart from that, it is possible that M. de Torcy might have a good many questions to ask which do not occur to us here."

"I suppose you are right. It would be better if I went over there about it in person."

"I think so—and for more than one reason. We must not forget that you are still liable to be hanged as a Jacobite suspect, if not as my murderer. People are sure to talk, and there is no harm in being on the safe side. While you are away, we shall most likely put all these matters straight for you. Noel's case is simpler, as Coverdale can keep him out of sight till things can be arranged. He talks of going away to-morrow. By the way, what is to be done with your friend, captain Kermode?"

"I have been thinking of that. Certainly I owe my life to him. I should like to buy him another ship—or give him say £300 to do it himself. But I am not in funds for it just yet."

"That is nothing. The lawyers have more savings for me than I know what to do with, so take whatever you want for the old scoundrel. He amuses me, I confess."

Into the comparing of notes and exchanging of explanations which occupied at this juncture the various personages under the roof of Dorrington Hall, it is needless here to enter. Suffice it to remark that Gwynett was enabled at last to recognize, in Armand Gaultier's passion for Muriel, the key to at least three of the abbé's repeated attempts on his rival's life. Of the affair at St. Malo no explanation could be suggested, and Gwynett remained under the impression that the outrage must have been intended for some other person.

Within a couple of days of the final disaster to the *Fleur de Lys*, Noel Wray had departed secretly, under an assumed name, for Coverdale's place in Yorkshire, the Jacobite prisoners were dispersed far and wide on their return to their respective homes, and the corporal had reported to his superior officer at Plymouth that his charges had made their escape in the confusion attendant upon the wreck, before he had had any opportunity of securing assistance.

Captain Kermode and his half-brothers were at the same time handed the money for a new schooner to replace the original *Royal Mary*, and went their way rejoicing. It was arranged that they should meet Gwynett a week later at Sandwich, where their small lugger was lying, and convey him to Calais. Thence he proposed to journey to Paris, to acquaint M. de Torcy with the recovery of the lost million of the *Fleur de Lys*.

BOOK IV

FIAT JUSTITIA

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

AUGURIES.

I N the bedroom of Sanson's house in the Rue St. Louis, into which the executioner of Paris had once invited Gwynett to see little Charlot asleep, a couple of men were bending over the bed, in which the child was again lying. One of them was Dr. Vidal, the other Sanson himself. Charlot had just swallowed some medicine from a spoon, and on a table near were two or three bottles. The doctor was examining one of the alcohol thermometers of the period (superseded four years later by Fahrenheit's improved one of mercury), which he had taken from under the boy's arm.

"There is really very little the matter, monsieur," remarked Vidal. "It is a feverish cold, nothing more. The wetting you speak of is quite enough to account for that. Keep him in bed for three or four days and he will be all right."

"You reassure me greatly, M. le docteur," replied Sanson. "I was afraid it was going to be some eruptive fever."

"Where is the other little fellow?" asked the doctor, putting his thermometer into his breast-pocket.

"I will fetch him, monsieur."

Sanson went out, and presently returned with little Justin, whom the reader has seen in the gardens of Monceaux, and whose case had been recommended to Vidal by Gwynett when he last took his departure from Paris. The child was paler and thinner than before, and walked with increased feebleness. He came up to the doctor very will-

ingly, and the latter, after making his usual examination, dismissed him with a smile, and rose to take his departure. Sanson accompanied him downstairs to the door.

"You think there is no hope for the lad, M. le docteur?" he asked, in a low tone.

"None," replied Vidal. "He may live three months. Perhaps four, but I doubt it. The decline is proceeding very rapidly."

"*A propos*, M. le docteur, have you heard anything of that good M. de Starhemberg lately?"

"Nothing since he left Paris."

"If you have occasion to write to him, do me the great favor to convey my respects to him, monsieur."

"With pleasure. Good evening."

Sanson shut the street door, and went upstairs rather slowly.

"It will be a dreadful blow to Charlot," he soliloquized, with parental selfishness. "Luckily, so far, he sees nothing except that Justin is usually poorly."

On the landing he was met by his single servant-of-all-work, an elderly woman who was nearly stone deaf, and with whom as a result very little conversation could be carried on. She held out a parcel wrapped up rather carefully in a linen cover.

"This was left here while the doctor was upstairs," she said.

"Who left it?" added Sanson, in signs.

The woman replied that the messenger was a stranger to her, and retired to the lower regions, while Sanson took the parcel into a large empty room on the ground floor, to open it. This apartment was one rarely used by the household, and contained nothing but a massive oak table standing under the high window at the farther end, with half a dozen severe-looking chairs round it. The floor of the room was three or four steps below the level of the hall out of which it opened.

Sanson untied the parcel at the table, and found its contents to be a handsome child's suit of blue velvet, with a piece of paper pinned to it on which was written, "For Charlot, from Marie Latour."

Sanson turned the paper over with a frown.

"This is a new dodge," he muttered discontentedly.

"How damnably persistent the woman is! I suppose now it will be 'dear Charlot' every time one sees her—after hating him like poison ever since he was born. To say nothing of never having seen him, to my knowledge. I suppose she must have guessed the size from his age."

He folded up the clothes, and put them in the cover again, saying to himself,

"I won't begin this sort of thing. One can't very well refuse a present for the boy, but it would go against the grain to see him wear them. Justin shall have them, poor little fellow! They will please him immensely."

He took the parcel and carried it up to Charlot's room, where Justin was playing with some toys at the bedside.

"Justin," he said, "here are some pretty clothes for you. Let us see if they are likely to fit you."

Justin came up with a flush of pleased surprise on his pale face, and felt the pile of the velvet, with curious fingers. Sanson tried the length of the coat, and trousers against the lad as he stood, and remarked,

"I fancy they will do, my boy. If they are too wide, old Margotin must take them in for you. You can try them on now. I am going out and will send her to you."

He went down to give the instructions to the old woman, put on his hat, and left the house. It was after sunset, and the dusk of the twilight was falling over the city. He made his way with rather indolent steps towards the Rue Beauregard, and stopped in front of the herbalist's shop kept by Marie Latour. Of this, mention has been made somewhat earlier in this history, and it need only be added that it now bore the legend "Perfumes and Cosmetics" on the sign, and had an air of being well-appointed and prosperous.

As he pushed open the half-door, it rang a little bell, and Marie Latour came into the shop from a door at the back. She was richly dressed for a woman of the trading class, but her appearance, which had been rather handsome ten or twelve months before, had in the interval lost much of its attractiveness. Her figure had shrunk away, her face was thin and sallow, and her formerly brilliant eyes and complexion were dull and faded. But her face brightened at the sight of Sanson, and she came forward to meet him with an eager smile.

"You will come into the sitting-room?" she asked, as she held out her hand in greeting.

Sanson looked round the shop, which was empty of customers at the time, and seated himself on a tall stool.

"I need not do that," he replied indifferently. "I have not time to stop. I came merely to thank you for your very obliging present to Charlot."

The woman's face flushed angrily at his tone, and she bit her lips as she stood facing him.

"It is some weeks since you favored me with a visit," she said, with a little unsteadiness in her voice.

"Is it? Well, better late than never. You see I am much engaged. That did not of course prevent my hastening to acknowledge your kindness to my little son."

The woman kept her eyes fixed on Sanson, who looked everywhere but at his hostess, and remarked,

"I have been hoping you would bring him to see me, ever since you took him from that farm in the country."

Sanson frowned as he replied,

"Yes. I think you said so before. If I did not venture to trouble you, it was because you had always made a grievance of him. In fact, I rather imagine you detested him—being my wife's son."

"If I did, she is here no longer."

"True, I have to deplore her loss."

"That is nothing new. What is new is your manner to me. What have I done? You are false, or you are beginning to be false—which is it?"

The woman's voice trembled with suppressed rage, and her fingers closed and unclosed spasmodically as she leaned against the counter opposite Sanson.

"For a year past," she went on, "you have had the air of tolerating me. For the last six months you have barely tolerated me. What is the reason? Is it some other woman?"

Sanson submitted resignedly to this catechism, and replied in a bored tone,

"I don't think so. At least, no particular woman. I adore the sex, as you know. I always did."

"I have seen you more than once with women. Is it one of them?"

Sanson smiled a self-satisfied smile.

"Really," he replied, "I don't recollect. It is no crime, I believe, to be popular with the ladies. If it is, I cannot help it."

The woman stamped her foot on the floor.

"All that is nothing but prevarication. You are tired of me. Confess it! if you are not too cowardly——"

Sanson shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Don't say cowardly," he remonstrated. "Considerate is a better word."

"Then you do confess?"

"Confess what?"

"That I no longer please you."

Sanson brought his eyes round to the speaker, and cast a cursory glance over her.

"Possibly you are right," he remarked in a dubious tone. "I have not given the subject any close consideration."

"Tell me the truth."

"One never tells the truth to women—it is in bad taste."

"Be it so. Nevertheless, tell me."

Sanson shrugged his shoulders again.

"I think I will say good evening," he suggested. "Our conversation seems to be getting unsympathetic."

He made a movement to rise from the stool, but the woman advanced and stood over him.

"You are tired of me," she insisted.

"Very well, if you say so."

"Why?"

"Why, indeed? Only if you provide facts, my dear Marie, you must also provide explanations."

"Four years ago you promised to love me always."

"Four years ago! and you grumble! Four years is a small eternity. Besides, four years ago things were different."

"What has changed? am I different?"

"Certainly you are not quite the same."

"And of course you are the same?"

"I admire the same things. That is where my constancy shows itself. No one ever accused me of getting tired of youth and beauty."

"You are brutal, monsieur."

"On the contrary, my dear Marie. I never told you I admired you because you were old and ugly—quite the re-

verse. I could not admire you on those grounds even now. Nevertheless, as a man of taste, which I have always been, I cannot affect any rapturous desire to lower my standard."

"Say at once that you find me less young-looking, less handsome, and that your fickle admiration has gone elsewhere."

Sanson crossed his legs, and looked round the room with a wearied air.

"I don't know that I can improve on your way of putting it," he said. "Except that I protest against the word fickle. It does me injustice, as I suggested before."

The woman seemed to force herself to be silent for a second or two. Her breast heaved, and she drew her breath hurriedly. Then she remarked, in a quieter tone,

"The child has something to do with it, I know. It was not my fault that I could not fall down and worship it, as you do. Had I been its mother, as I ought to have been——"

"Pooh!" interrupted Sanson roughly. "Are we to begin all that over again?"

"No. But why should you keep me from him, or him from me, now?"

"Because things are quite well as they are. He is no concern of yours—thanking you at the same time for your very charming present. Let us say no more about him."

"Nor about myself?"

"Not if it involves any acrimonious discussion."

At this moment a carriage drove up to the shop, and a footman let down the steps. Sanson seized the opportunity to make his escape, and after a hurried adieu to the angry Latour he passed out of the door.

When he reached the street he noticed that a second carriage, of rather shabby appearance, and evidently hired, was just drawing up a few yards behind the nearer one. It was nearly dusk, and he saw nothing of the occupant of the first vehicle. But from the window of the second a woman's head was put forth, in order to see why the carriage had pulled up short of the shop-door. Her face, partly muffled in a wrap, was close to Sanson's as he passed, and the splendor of its beauty nearly took his breath away.

He stopped involuntarily, and could not forbear to stare

open-eyed at the entrancing vision until the woman, becoming aware of his gaze, threw herself back into the shadow with an impatient exclamation. At the same moment the driver of the vehicle got down, and came forward to ask for instructions.

"Wait," was the reply.

Sanson was a good deal disappointed at this decision. He looked round, but saw no convenient place to which he could retire for the purpose of keeping an eye on the charming unknown. He hesitated an instant, peered without success to see if there were any recognizable marks on the door of the carriage, and finally went off homewards in a state of ecstatic adoration.

"Never have I seen such beauty!" he repeated to himself every few yards of his way. "Never! She ought to be a lady, in spite of appearances—certainly the carriage was not ostentatious. I must keep friends with Marie, and find out who this customer of hers is. Poor Marie! and to think that at one time I really admired her! But I am always too good-natured with women who throw themselves at me. It is my weakness."

* * * * *

In the meantime the customer from the first carriage had purchased what she required and driven off again. The second carriage drew up to the door, and the woman entered the shop, throwing off her wrap as she did so. It was the comtesse de Valincour. Latour came forward, and waited inquiringly.

"Can we be alone?" asked the comtesse.

"Yes, madame. I was about to close the shop."

"Tell the coachman to drive round to the back, and wait."

Latour went to the coachman, and delivered the order. The carriage drove off, and the woman closed the shop-door, lighted a small lamp, and fastened the inside shutters. Then she took the lamp in her hand, made a sign to the comtesse that she would precede her, and went out at the back door of the shop. The comtesse followed her along a short passage into a room which opened out of it on the right.

This room appeared to be part of a much larger one, from the remainder of which it was divided off by heavy

black curtains. The latter ascended into a black dome-shaped ceiling, almost invisible by the feeble light of the lamp. The walls were also draped in black, and a dark oaken cabinet at the side of the doorway scarcely relieved itself from the gloom of its surroundings. A small black table and two chairs completed the visible contents of the room.

Latour put the lamp on the table, and locked the door. The comtesse seated herself on one of the chairs by the table without a glance at the rest of the room, and fixed her eyes on the flame of the lamp in a sort of reverie. Latour came forward to the table, and looked inquiringly at the comtesse.

"The same question, madame?" she asked.

"Yes."

Latour went to the cabinet, opened its doors, and brought out successively a thin axe-head of silver, a ring-tripod of the same metal about five inches high, a spirit-lamp burning alcohol, and a small sphere of amethystine agate. From a drawer in the table she produced a circular silver tray, thinly sprinkled with sand, and laid it on the table. On the tray she placed the spirit-lamp, with the tripod over it, and laid the axe-head horizontally across the ring of the tripod. Around the lamp she drew some symbolical figures with her forefinger in the sand, placed the agate on the axe, and lit the spirit-lamp.

"The question, madame," she murmured.

The comtesse, who had watched these proceedings with the indifference of long familiarity, fixed her eyes on the agate, and asked, almost in a whisper,

"Will he return?"

The blue flame continued to burn under the thin silver wedge until it grew red hot, and the agate began to vibrate. Then it slowly rolled about on the axe, and finally fell over into the tray. The comtesse leaned back in her chair with a sigh of satisfaction.

"At last, Marie!" she said. It has never fallen off before."

"No. It promises well."

"Try the smoke."

Latour removed the axe with a pair of pincers obtained from the drawer, covered the tripod with a piece of wire



gauze, and brought some powder in a wooden box. Then she drew some fresh characters in the sand, and put a pinch of the powder on the wire gauze.

A pale greenish smoke immediately rose above the gauze, and made its way in a long spiral towards the ceiling. The two women watched to see whether or not the column was deflected sideways before it disappeared in the darkness of the dome. But it remained vertical.

"Oh!" exclaimed the comtesse. "Do you see that, Marie? It is for the first time—before, it has always turned aside. The answer is certainly yes."

Latour nodded.

"Shall we try the cup?" she asked.

The comtesse hesitated. The two divinations by axe and smoke—the axinomanteia and capnomanteia of the ancients—had been favorable. A third might contradict the two previous ones. But if it were a good augury, the promise of the others would be immeasurably strengthened.

"Yes," she decided.

Latour removed the tray and put away its contents. From the cabinet she took a goblet of Venice glass and a little wooden box containing half a dozen strips of thinly beaten gold and silver, on which were scratched certain symbols of mediæval magic. She put these in the cup, half filled it with water, and swept it carefully round and round until the gold and silver strips followed the revolving current. Then she put the cup down in front of the comtesse, and the latter watched intently the settling of the strips.

They gradually came to rest side by side, and the comtesse rose with a triumphant expression on her face.

"See!" she exclaimed. "Not one is crossed over the other. All is well. Never before to-night has a single augury been good."

Latour looked at the cup with a certain interest.

"It seems so," she said slowly. "For myself, I never thought much of these pagan auguries. If it were a *messe noire*, now——"

The comtesse lifted her head suddenly.

"Hush!" she said. "That must be only a last resource. I think d'Argenson suspects you or someone already. He has been going over the La Voysin papers, and I am afraid

some customer of yours must have let drop something. Of course monseigneur scoffs at it, as he does at everything. But if d'Argenson presses him, he will certainly authorize inquiry, and I may not be able to put them off the scent."

"Rest assured, madame, no risk shall be run. People got a little too careless in La Voysin's time. Shall I see after your carriage?"

"Yes."

Latour disappeared, and the comtesse was left to her own reflections, smiling at the cup before her. Then the woman returned.

"It waits, madame."

The comtesse rose, and followed Latour out of the room. Some way further down the passage another door was opened which led to a back street, in which the vehicle was waiting. The comtesse stepped in, drew down the blinds, and was driven to madame de Ventadour's hôtel, where she dismissed the hired carriage, and had her own brought round. A little later she drove home.

Arrived at the door of her hotel, the house-steward came forward to receive her as she alighted.

"Has anyone called?" she asked.

"Monseigneur is here, madame."

"Alone?"

"No, madame. M. le chevalier de Starhemberg is with him."

The comtesse stopped suddenly, and turned rather pale. Then she recovered her composure, nodded, and passed into the house.

"It is wonderful," she said to herself.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PÈRE GERMONT AGAIN.

MADAME," said the regent, "I expect a double welcome this evening, as you may suppose. I should tell you that M. de Starhemberg has only been in Paris an hour, so that you are the first of his friends, after myself, to receive a visit from him."

"M. le chevalier is very good," said the comtesse, as Gwynett bent over her hand. "I recollect that I was not quite well when he left Paris, and could not do myself the pleasure of seeing him when he came to say good-bye."

"Which I regretted the more, madame, as it was then doubtful whether I should ever have occasion to revisit Paris."

A pang went through the heart of the comtesse at these words.

"Then I must have been nothing to him," she thought while she forced herself to smile brilliantly upon her guest.

"We are glad not to have known that, M. le chevalier. But at all events you are back again now. Do you make a long stay?"

"The chevalier has some affair to go into with M. de Torcy," put in the regent. "I have been telling him it must wait for a few days, as the marquis is in the south—at Bordeaux, I fancy. But he is expected back within the week."

"And after that, M. le chevalier?"

"After that, madame, I have matters that recall me to England without delay."

At this moment the abbé Dubois was announced, and came forward to greet Gwynett.

"I have been kept by milord Stair," he said, "or I should have had the pleasure of welcoming M. de Starhemberg before. Did you accomplish your mission to your satisfaction, M. le chevalier?"

"In most respects, M. l'abbé. But, as it happened, I was robbed of milord Stair's safe-conducts, and one object of my return here is to secure his good offices again for myself and my friend Noel Wray."

"There will be no difficulty about that. Happily he has not the slightest suspicion of your connection with the Nonancourt affair."

"There is one point about that which I am ashamed to say has only just now occurred to me. What became of that unlucky colonel Douglas?"

The regent burst out laughing.

"True," he said, "you would not be in the way of hearing that. But the end of the affair was that milord Stair became first of all impatient, then suspicious, and finally very angry. He attacked us about the disappearance of Douglas, and we had to explain that he was under arrest for attempting to assassinate the chevalier de St. George. Then milord was full of virtuous indignation, repudiated any idea of intended violence to the chevalier, and swore that the three men were only set to watch his movements in the ordinary way. Naturally we did not want a scandal, and as M. de St. George was by that time in Scotland, we set Douglas and the other fellow at liberty. Nothing has been seen of them since. The chevalier, as you may have heard, is now at Avignon, and nobody recollects his existence."

Some general conversation followed, and then Gwynett asked permission to take his leave, on the score of being fatigued with his journey from Calais. Dubois rose at the same time and volunteered to accompany Gwynett back to the Palais-Royal, where his old rooms had been promptly assigned to him by the regent. The latter was left alone with madame de Valincour.

"M. le chevalier looks very well," remarked the comtesse, as the regent toyed with his coffee.

"Remarkably so, I think. Happiness is a great beautifier, people say."

"Is the chevalier happier than usual?"

"I gather that he ought to be. There is some curious story about his being separated from his betrothed some years ago—she was lost, in fact."

The comtesse gave an imperceptible start.

"His betrothed.?"

"Yes. They have met again, by some remarkable accident, while he was away."

"Is it a good alliance?"

"Really, I don't know. But it appears to be an affair of inclination, not of convenience."

The comtesse received this news in silence, and it was several seconds before she resumed the conversation.

"Then it is a love affair?" she asked.

"Emphatically, on both sides. By chance, something about it came to de Torcy's knowledge not long ago, from the intended father-in-law. The two young people seem to be devotedly attached to each other."

"Then they will probably marry?"

"As soon as the chevalier returns to England. The whole story is very curious, if I can recollect it rightly."

Gwynett had given the regent an outline of his recent adventures, omitting for the present all reference to the abbé Gaultier's share in them, and the regent proceeded to retail them to madame de Valincour.

The comtesse listened with inattentive ears. All this was nothing. The one fatal fact was that the chevalier de Starhemberg was leaving Paris and France, probably forever, and leaving them because his heart was in England.

"I am lost," she said to herself, "if he goes back to this girl. I have a week—no more. After that, all will be over—unless—yes. Marie was right. There is still the *messe*."

"The coincidences are remarkable, are they not?" asked the regent.

"Very," replied the comtesse, who had not heard a word of what her companion had been saying.

She rang a bell, and gave instructions that madame Latour should be sent for the first thing on the following day. Then she listened to the regent until the conversation and the subject dropped.

The next morning Marie Latour was announced while the comtesse was making a pretence at a breakfast.

Madame de Valincour had evidently not slept. Her appearance struck Latour, but the latter made no comment. Her own mind was in a tumult of jealous rage and humiliation at the evident indifference of her fickle lover, and she, too, had passed a sleepless night.

"Have the auguries failed, madame?" she asked, when the door had closed and they were alone.

"No. They were true to a marvel."

Latour waited for further enlightenment. The comtesse did not at first speak. Hitherto, whatever may have been her transactions or relations with Latour, she had made her little if anything of a confidante. The professor of the black art only knew that madame de Valincour was anxious that someone or other should return to Paris. But now it was necessary either to be more explicit, or to leave unused the most potent weapon which the combined irreligion and superstition of that remarkable period placed at the disposal of the unscrupulous—a weapon to which allusion had already been made in this history when referring to the widespread acceptance and practice of necromantic arts in the generation preceding the regency. To employ this, Latour's aid was indispensable, and the comtesse reluctantly made a virtue of necessity.

"Sit down, Marie," she said abruptly. "I want a *messe noire*. Will you arrange one for me?"

Latour took a seat opposite the comtesse, and looked at her fixedly.

"It may be expensive, madame."

"That, of course. We both run a risk, and naturally your risk must be paid for."

"It is not only I, but the celebrant, madame."

"Do you know of one?"

"I think so. In fact, I am almost sure. But I do not know what he will ask."

"You shall each have a thousand *lois d'or*. Will that satisfy you?"

"Yes, madame. I will undertake that that shall suffice, if at all. But there is one other thing—the candles. They are essential."

"I thought you knew the——?"

The comtesse did not finish the sentence, but Latour nodded.

"It is true," she said. "But he is an infidel, an atheist, a scoffer. I am not at all sure he will give any help. If he will not, it puts obstacles in the way."

"Money will overcome them. The real difficulty is the

short time. Whatever happens, we must have the business over within a week."

"I will do my best, madame."

There was an interval of silence, and then Latour said,

"You have not mentioned the prayer to be made, madame."

The comtesse knitted her brows, and replied after a moment's thought,

"It is that a man's love shall be taken from his betrothed wife, and fixed upon me forever and ever."

Latour made no answer, but half-closed her eyes and let a suppressed sigh escape her. Then she rose.

"That is all, madame?" she asked.

"Yes."

The comtesse rose in her turn, crossed the room to a desk, and brought out some rouleaux of gold.

"Here are a hundred louis," she said. "You can have the rest when necessary."

Latour took the rouleaux, thrust them into the bosom of her dress, and then produced from her pocket a little phial.

"*A propos*, madame," she said, "I have here something which I thought you might like to purchase, in case it would interest monseigneur."

"Why?" asked the comtesse.

"Madame, it is a new discovery of a relative of mine, who is interested in chemistry, like monseigneur. It is a remarkable vegetable extract, hitherto unknown, and it only reached me to-day in a letter from my relative."

"Has it any peculiar properties?"

"Several, madame. But amongst others, it seems to be the most rapid poison known, if taken in any but the most minute quantities."

The comtesse looked at the phial with more interest than she had hitherto shown.

"Ah! And how has your relative ascertained that?"

"By experiments with rabbits, madame. One drop is sufficient."

"And what trace is left?"

"None, madame—absolutely."

The comtesse was silent a moment. Then she remarked, as she took the phial from Latour and examined it,

"It is possible, as you say, that monseigneur might be

interested in this preparation—especially as it is so potent. How much do you ask for it?”

“It is very troublesome to prepare, madame. I was told to ask ten louis.”

The comtesse took the money from the drawer of the desk by which she was standing, and handed it to Latour.

“You can leave the bottle. I will tell monseigneur what you say about it—if I remember. When shall I hear from you about the other matter?”

“If possible to-night, madame.”

Latour curtsied, and went out. The comtesse looked steadfastly at the little bottle for several seconds, apparently revolving something in her mind, and then put it away in a secret drawer of the desk.

Latour went home to the shop in the Rue Beauregard, which she had locked up during her absence. As she put the key in the lock to enter, a man who appeared to be on the look-out for the opening of the shop came up. He was dressed in the garb of a friar, with a deep hood shading his face. He wore very large tinted spectacles, and his mouth was concealed by a sort of respirator. It was père Germont, the curé of Ste. Marie Geneste.

“Good morning, Marie,” he said, as he reached the door.

Latour looked at him in some surprise.

“Why, it is uncle Germont!” she exclaimed. “Come in.”

The pair entered the shop, and the curé passed through it into a little sitting-room beyond. Here he sat down wearily, and his head fell forward with an air of profound dejection. Marie looked at him inquiringly.

“It is curious that you should be here,” she said. “I was just on the point of writing to you to come to Paris at once. What brings you?”

The curé sighed heavily.

“A great misfortune, Marie. Three days ago, in one of my experiments—a most promising one, which has cost me the savings of two years—the retort exploded, and wrecked my laboratory. There is scarcely an apparatus left undamaged or undestroyed. How to replace them I know not.”

“Your face has been injured, too?”

“No!” replied the curé quickly. “I usually go about

in this dress. I am all right. I walked most of the way here—for one thing, I hoped you might have sold the last phial I sent you.”

“I sold it this morning. I asked ten louis for it—here they are.”

She placed the money on the table near the curé, who looked at it gloomily.

“Better than nothing,” he said. “I must try and get together a few things on credit, and pay an instalment down. Can you spare me anything?”

Latour put her hand in the bosom of her dress, pulled out the rouleaux of a hundred louis d’or, and laid them before père Germont. The curé uttered a cry of surprise.

“If you care to earn this, my uncle,” said Latour, “you can earn it, and ten times as much, for certain. Perhaps more, but I cannot tell that just yet.”

The curé turned over the gold with trembling fingers, and his eyes gleamed even through his dark spectacles.

“This is a fortune,” he cried eagerly. “With this I can buy instruments, crucibles, alembics, retorts, precious ores—everything! What is it all about? What is to be done?”

“It is a serious matter,” replied Latour.

“A crime?”

“Legally a crime.”

“A risk?”

“Yes.”

The curé shrugged his shoulders.

“I risk my life every experiment I make,” he said. “Is it worse than that?”

“Only of being burnt alive at La Grève, my uncle.”

The curé looked up keenly.

“A little sorcery, perhaps?”

“More than a little.”

The curé leaned forward and whispered,

“Ah! Then it must be——?”

“A *messe noire*, my uncle.”

There was a short silence, and the curé remarked,

“So! and for whom?”

“Is it well to say, my uncle?”

“Not if you are satisfied. A woman, of course?”

“Yes.”

“Safe?”

"Quite—and powerful. Very powerful."

"And the price?"

"Two thousand louis."

"You have to provide the—the elements?"

"Yes. I look to you for the Host."

"Good. Do you see your way to the child?"

"One can always manage that, somehow."

"And the candles?"

"I hope so."

"How much will they cost?"

"I have no idea."

"But you know the man?"

"Very well. But this is a new affair. Still, a thousand louis ought to be sufficient."

"One would think so—if he will do it at all."

"He need not know everything."

"He can hardly know anything without knowing too much. However, he can only refuse. If he does, no doubt things can be managed without him."

Latour looked up sharply.

"What do you mean by 'without him?' It must be done rightly, or I will have nothing to do with it. Have you no conscience?"

The curé flung himself back in his chair impatiently.

"Well, well!" he muttered. "As you like—I know your prejudices. When will you find out about Sanson?"

"At once."

Latour went into the front shop, wrote out a short note, and disappeared somewhere to find a messenger.

The curé remained at the table, counting the louis d'or with earnest care. When he had gone through them he leaned back in his chair, and folded his arms.

"It is curious," he reflected, "what a fuss these *dévôtes* make, even in their blasphemies. It must be a great comfort to believe enormously, when one believes anything at all. I wish I could take anything—outside of my laboratory—half as seriously as these good people take their friend the devil."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

M. SANSON DRIVES A BARGAIN.

AN hour or two after the conversation between Marie Latour and her uncle, the curé, it happened that M. Charles Sanson was enjoying his dinner at the little *cabaret* wherein he was first introduced to the reader in a former portion of this history.

Sitting at the same table and sharing the meal was the man Lambert, whose fortunes seemed to have changed for the worse since his liberation from prison at the instance of the British ambassador. It was in fact his woe-begone and shrunken appearance, when accidentally meeting Sanson half an hour previously, which had elicited from the executioner the compassionate proposal that his seedy acquaintance should help him to eat his dinner at his favorite tavern—an invitation which had been rapturously accepted.

The hungry Lambert set to work with the air of one provisioning himself for a month's fast, and had finished his share of the entertainment before his host was half way through. He leaned back with a sigh, partly of regret and partly of repletion, and helped himself to another glass of wine.

"You will excuse my being leisurely," observed Sanson when he noticed that he had been left-behind. "I always take time, when I can—when my duties permit me to be at ease, that is to say."

"I suppose you are usually busy, monsieur."

Sanson gave a little sigh.

"Well, to tell you the truth, things have been very dull of late. Monseigneur is a man whom I esteem very much—none the less, perhaps, because he takes after me in being devoted to the ladies—but he has nearly ruined me."

"How is that?"

"He has sent orders to the judges to be lenient with certain classes of offenders, who used to be my main support.

Imagine to yourself that for six months they have not given me a man to hang for stealing food! And as to a really paying job, why I have almost forgotten how to burn alive, or break upon the wheel, or draw and quarter. Certainly the widow Scarron and her Jesuits were a set of *misérables*. But at all events they enabled a man to earn a decent living."

"What executions have you on hand at present?" asked Lambert in a tone of polite interest, bred of the hospitality he was enjoying.

"I had a couple of hangings this morning," replied Sanson. "Merely two cut-throats who made a mistake the other night, attacked a wayfarer at Chaillot, and found themselves both shot in the legs before they could get at their quarry. Well-dressed rascals, too, which is lucky. I shall get three louis for their clothes, I hope. On the other hand, I don't expect any relatives will turn up to buy the bodies from me, and that will be a dead loss. To-morrow morning I go to Mantes for a day's work there. The executioner of the town is ill, and has asked me to take his place. You can quite understand, my dear friend, that for a Parisian there is no *éclat* in these provincial affairs. But I never hesitate to oblige a colleague, who might otherwise have to fall back upon some bungling assistant. However, all this is a little too professional. Let us drink to the health of the ladies, and we will have another bottle."

Lambert gave a fervent assent to this proposal, and the fresh bottle was duly opened.

"To beauty!" said Sanson, as he held up his glass gracefully. "And more especially to the most beautiful woman in Paris!"

"By all means," replied Lambert, emptying his glass at a gulp. "I only wish every woman who considers herself the greatest beauty in Paris would stand treat to me. *Diable!* I should never be sober."

"My dear friend," said Sanson, "you misapprehend me. I was referring to the one who is the most beautiful, in *my* judgment. You will allow that my judgment goes for something."

"Without doubt, monsieur. Is it permitted to ask who the lady may be?"

"I am bursting with chagrin that I don't know. I wish

I did. I can assure you, my dear friend, that my first and only sight of her last evening took away all my night's rest."

Sanson made this confession with so much fervor and self-abstraction that his companion felt quite safe in gently conveying the bottle to his own side of the table, with a view to keeping it there for his exclusive consumption.

"You are too susceptible, my dear M. Sanson," he suggested blandly, as he filled up his glass. "These violent emotions must be injurious to the constitution."

"I am afraid so," replied Sanson seriously. "But what is one to do?"

At this moment a knock was heard at the door, and a lad entered with a note in his hand.

"I was sent here from M. Sanson's house, messieurs," he said. "I have this letter for him."

Sanson held out his hand for the letter, and recognized Latour's handwriting in the address.

"*Peste!*" he muttered angrily. "Can I not even eat my dinner in peace?"

He opened the letter, and read:

"I wish to see you on some urgent business as soon as possible. Shall I come to your house, or will you call here?"

"Certainly not at my house," said Sanson to himself. He turned to the lad, and asked,

"Are you going back to the Rue Beauregard?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Say to madame Latour that I will call in the course of the afternoon."

"Yes, monsieur."

The lad went out, and Lambert reluctantly moved the wine bottle a little nearer to his host.

"The ladies will not leave you alone," he remarked, hoping that the reign of sentiment might recommence and the wine be neglected.

"*Diable!* you are right," grumbled Sanson, half-emptying the bottle into his glass. "It is astonishing, my dear friend, how slow women are to understand that yesterday is not to-day—and what a fuss they make because one cannot call it to-morrow as well."

"That is unreasonable, certainly," replied Lambert, eyeing the bottle which his host still held in his hand.

"It is monstrous," said Sanson. He poured out the remainder of the wine and drank it off, while Lambert sighed heavily and loaded his host's correspondent with silent curses.

After a minute's disgusted silence Sanson rose, bade his guest a curt farewell, and strolled off to his home preparatory to making his promised appearance in the Rue Beauregard. He endeavored to restore his disturbed equanimity with another bottle of wine, and then in a somewhat more genial mood sallied forth to keep his appointment.

The curé had temporarily disappeared from the perfumer's shop, and Sanson found Latour alone. He was asked into the little sitting-room, commanding a view of the shop through a small window, and took his seat with rather a perfunctory air.

"Well, my dear Marie," he said, "you have something to say to me, it appears?"

Latour seated herself where she could look through the little window, and replied,

"Yes. The matter is this. I have a customer who has a fancy for trying fortunes and so forth—she comes here occasionally for my assistance in making her experiments."

"I wonder at your wasting time over such imbecile superstitions."

"She pays me well," explained Latour coldly.

"That alters the case, of course."

"She has now an idea of studying conjurations."

"It is lucky your idiot is a wealthy idiot."

"Perhaps so. Anyhow, she pays."

"Quite right, my dear Marie. Well?"

"It appears that for one of the ceremonies there is a certain requirement, rather difficult to obtain in the ordinary way. I thought perhaps it might be worth your while to help—on reasonable terms, of course."

"If it is a matter of business, I have no objection to make. What is it you want?"

"Not I—my customer."

"Well, what does your customer want?"

"Two candles, made of the fat of a *pendu*."*

* Man who has been hanged.

Sanson sat bolt upright, and looked sharply at his companion.

"Indeed?" he remarked suspiciously. "Do you know, my good Marie, I have heard something of that before, sometime or other. It smells of sorcery a mile off."

"I thought you did not believe in sorcery?"

"If I do not, I believe at all events in getting burnt alive at La Grève, like mère Voysin and her friends. It is true we have now the advantage of living under a regent who believes in nothing. But that does not alter the law."

"Are you not going a little too fast? I have not asked you to assist in any sorcery."

"That is true. Well, let me hear all you have to say."

"My customer will pay well."

"So she ought, for a thing like that."

"The question is, can you manage it?"

"Certainly, I can, if I choose."

"It must be within a week, or the favorable conjuncture will have passed. How does that affect you?"

"It makes no difference, as it happens. I have two fellows on hand now, hung this morning. One of them is a mere skeleton, but the other might serve—if I consent. Only, on the whole, I am not disposed to consent."

"My customer will pay a hundred louis apiece for the candles."

Sanson stroked his chin reflectively.

"You see, my dear Marie, people are not to be relied on. Your customer must be rather in earnest to offer two hundred louis for a couple of candles. If she is in earnest, she has probably some strong motive, and if she gets nothing by her little conjuration, she will be furiously disappointed. Then she will go and tell someone in confidence that she has been swindled. In twenty-four hours M. d'Argenson will know all about it, and we shall be in the Bastille."

"I am sure my customer will hold her tongue. I dare say, also, she would offer five hundred louis rather than be baulked."

"Worse and worse. There must be something damnably illegal about a pair of candles that are to cost five hundred louis."

Latour made a movement of impatience.

"How much do you want?" she asked brusquely.

Sanson shrugged his shoulders.

"Suppose we discuss an alternative," he said. "Your customer, I gather, attaches importance to the composition of the candles?"

"It is vital."

"You mean she thinks it is vital. Let her continue to think so—it is inexpressibly ridiculous, but convenient. I am quite open to accept five hundred louis for a pair of candles for her—candles, you understand, which will look everything that she could wish. Then all of us will be satisfied."

Latour fixed a piercing glance upon the speaker, and asked sharply,

"What do you mean, monsieur? Will they not be genuine?"

"Perfectly genuine, my dear Marie. You need not be afraid of their not burning."

"But composed of what?"

"Something quite respectable—not even stolen. I suppose your customer does not pretend to know the fat of a *pendu* when she sees it? If not, good honest mutton tallow will answer her purpose just as well—so long as she is no wiser."

Latour rose, pale with horror.

"Monsieur, you must be mad! Do you wish us both to be blasted, struck dead here as we sit, for contemplating such a blasphemous trick? Be silent!"

The woman's agitation and terror were so evident that Sanson burst out laughing.

"Really, my dear Marie, your scruples are monumental. If you can have the conscience to permit your customer to pay five hundred louis for what is not worth five *sous*, it seems to me that——"

"You know absolutely nothing about it," interrupted Latour. "It is a question of what I ask for, or nothing."

Sanson shook his head.

"I don't like it, I confess. If anything gets about, they will say I ought to have informed M. d'Argenson."

"Nothing shall get about. Of that, you may be quite assured."

"It is easy to say so. But what discretion could one

expect from an old hag who is fool enough to believe in that sort of hanky-panky?"

"You are quite mistaken. She is neither old nor a hag."

Sanson smiled a little incredulously.

"Perhaps even good-looking?" he suggested.

"You might think so," retorted Latour tartly.

"And since when has a good-looking young woman required corpse-candles to get her own way? Really things must be coming to a pretty pass. I suppose I may not ask who it is?"

"You will certainly not get an answer."

"Then, my dear Marie, you will certainly not get your candles."

"That is nonsense. The five hundred louis are just as good gold, whoever the giver may be."

An idea suddenly flashed into Sanson's mind, and he remarked to Latour cunningly,

"Well, this is not a thing to be decided on in a hurry. You should have spoken to me a week or so ago."

"I only knew to-day."

Sanson chuckled.

"How was it you did not guess last night?" he asked.

"Because I did not," replied Latour unguardedly. "I sent for you the moment I knew what was wanted."

Sanson burst out laughing.

"Now, my dear Marie, let us understand one another. If you had only told me at the outset that it was for the customer who called on you last night, just as I left here, we could have come to terms at once."

"What customer?" asked Latour, with sudden suspicion.

"Not the first, my dear Marie—the second."

"What has either the first or the second to do with it?"

"The first, nothing—but the second, everything."

"Why?"

"Why! Because, my dear Marie, the second was a perfect Venus, a Dione, an Aphrodite, an Astarte—everything in fact that messieurs the poets have agreed to call the very ideal of loveliness. Never have I beheld the like."

Latour turned scarlet, and her eyes flashed.

"You saw her, then?"

"For half a minute only—alas!"

"Time enough to make a good many comparisons, it would seem, monsieur."

"Time enough, my dear Marie? One second was sufficient. Now tell me who was the divine creature?"

"She is nothing to you, monsieur."

"Nothing! Nothing to a man of my susceptibility! But women are all alike. They can never do justice to the beauty of another woman."

Latour stamped her foot furiously.

"Are you bent upon maddening me, monsieur? Yesterday, you came to tell me you are sick of me—and to-day, forsooth, I am to listen to your ravings about another woman's beauty!"

"Well, well!" replied Sanson impatiently, "it is a subject on which we are not likely to agree. But listen—all this about your candles is quite simple now that I know they are for that fine woman. I have changed my mind, and will furnish what you want."

"For the five hundred louis?"

"For nothing."

"For nothing!"

"Yes. More than that, I will respect the charming unknown's *incognito*. On second thoughts, I see that she has a right to insist on it. In fact a woman with a face like that has a right to insist on anything. I only make one little stipulation."

"Well?"

"Your lovely customer must fetch the candles herself."

"Herself?"

"Why not? Candles worth five hundred louis a pair are worth fetching, one would think. All that she has to do is to come to my house to-night—as late as she likes——"

"Why late?"

"*Peste!* Lest she should be seen, of course. Do you imagine I have no discretion?"

"And they will be ready for her?"

"They will be ready in the morning—which will be quite soon enough."

Latour stared at the speaker for a moment, and then turned livid.

"And you propose that to my face!" she screamed. "I will kill you first!"

Sanson rose leisurely, and picked up his hat.

"That would be deplorable," he remarked. "You decide me to have nothing to do with the matter. Only, as I had rather set my heart on a visit from your adorable sorceress, I am afraid my disappointment may show itself in my face—to M. d'Argenson, for example."

"You dare not!"

"Dare not? My dear Marie, I fail to see what courage is wanted for ranging one's self on the safe side."

Latour sprang up, locked the door, and planted herself against it.

"Miserable traitor! You shall not leave this room till you have sworn never to betray me!"

"Eh! what a spitfire! Well, I will swear all that, if you insist upon it—but, as before, on one condition."

Latour glared at the speaker in silence, her eyes flashing, and her bosom heaving tumultuously.

"The condition that you convey my offer to the fair lady. She can only refuse. Then you may go to the devil or anyone else you like for your candles."

"And if I will not?"

"Then I shall go straight to M. d'Argenson."

"You heard what I said just now."

"Pooh! My dear Marie, that is not a good tone to adopt with me. If I once get really annoyed, I shall simply knock you down or strangle you, and go home. Therefore let us finish our interview amicably. Yes or no?"

"A million times, no!"

"Good. That is to the point—which cannot always be said of ladies' speeches. Now do me the favor to unlock that door, and permit me to pass."

Latour clenched her fists, and glared at Sanson like a tigress.

"Never!" she panted.

Sanson came nearer.

"Don't be a fool!" he remarked curtly. "Recollect that other people may have tempers beside yourself. Hitherto you have only seen my amiable side, and perhaps that misleads you. Open that door, and let us have no more nonsense."

Latour neither spoke nor moved, and Sanson, quite out of patience, made a step forward, and thrust her aside with

some violence. She staggered backwards a pace or two until she was stopped by a tall cabinet, and her face became whiter than before.

"Enough!" she said. "You may go. I, too, have changed my mind. I will tell her what you propose."

Sanson unlocked the door, with a return of amiability in his expression.

"That is all right," he said. "It is always better to have things upon a pleasant footing. You will let me know the answer?"

Latour took a step towards the nearest chair and sank into it, with her eyes fixed glassily on Sanson.

"Yes," she muttered hoarsely.

"Then I will say good afternoon."

Latour looked at him for a moment in silence, and then asked,

"Are you going home now?"

"Probably."

"Go home, then—and pray."

"Pray?"

"Yes—pray. Pray, as you never prayed in your life, that the answer shall be—no."

Sanson shrugged his shoulders, laughed good-naturedly, and went out humming a song.

For a while the woman sat silent and motionless, breathing heavily, with her eyes fixed upon vacancy. Then she started slightly, as if waking out of a dream, and muttered to herself,

"After all, she will refuse. But he will never come back again to me—never."

* * * * *

The comtesse de Valincour was walking up and down her dressing-room in a tempest of rage, disgust, and burning indignation, while Marie Latour looked on with dull eyes and a rigid, expressionless face.

"It is impossible, woman, that you can have been sent to outrage me with such a message from such a person! Someone has paid you to insult me—one of my enemies! Confess it!"

"Madame, everything has been just as I have said."

"I will never believe the miscreant could even imagine

such insolence or such audacity. It must have been some idiotic blunder of yours."

"On the contrary, madame, I made every protest, and only at the last moment consented to bring the message. After all, madame, you have merely to say no."

"But you said yourself that he would refuse the candles?"

"Yes, madame."

The comtesse tore a piece of lace out of her bodice with the angry clutching of her fingers.

"Was ever anything so bungled?" she exclaimed. "And just when every hour is of consequence. Where else can you go?"

"Nowhere, madame, that I know of. There have been so few executions of late, and I relied upon this. Of course, had one plenty of time——"

"You did not bribe high enough."

"The proposal speaks for itself, madame. If he prefers that to five hundred louis——"

"Offer a thousand—two thousand."

"Madame, he pointed out himself that the higher the bribe the greater the risk of accepting it. He does not know all, but he suspects enough to put him on his guard."

"Have you nothing that you can threaten him with? No secret of his?"

"No, madame."

"Is there no trap you can lay for him?"

"He leaves Paris to-morrow, madame, for a day or two. Anything of that sort requires time, and you speak of being in a hurry."

The comtesse resumed her walk with the gait of an imprisoned tigress.

"It is monstrous—infamous!" she panted. "But it shall be punished. Hanging is too good for such *canaille*."

Latour interrupted her patroness rather unceremoniously.

"Madame, it is only necessary to remark that this man does not know you in the least."

"He saw me, you said."

"By accident, madame, for a minute merely, and for the first time. You go about Paris so very little that he may never catch sight of you again. Besides, it was nearly dark.

You are perfectly safe in refusing, and that will end the matter."

"But then we shall not have the candles—and we must have them."

Latour began to tremble.

"It is impossible, madame," she said, "that you should pay such a price for them."

"I will pay any price that is necessary, woman," retorted the comtesse. "But that does not prevent my hating the necessity."

Latour's eyes flashed, and she drew a deep breath.

"Then you consent, madame?"

"Yes—no! Oh! it is too revolting!" and the comtesse panting, tore open her robe as if she were suffocating. "The wretch! the vile, loathsome reptile!"

"Pooh! madame," said Latour rudely, "that is nonsense. He is a man, like any other—and a handsome gentleman, besides. But you have said no, and I will take back that answer."

She flung her shawl hastily over her head, and took three or four rapid steps towards the door.

The comtesse looked after her with a sudden hardening of the face, and clutched her throat with her hand.

"Stop!" she cried. "The answer is—yes."

Latour stopped, and faced the comtesse.

"Do you mean that, madame?" she asked hoarsely.

"I mean that."

As she spoke the comtesse turned her back on Latour, walked slowly towards her bedroom, and shut herself in without another word. Latour's face changed as if twenty years had suddenly passed over it. For a moment she stood motionless. Then she stretched out her hand, and spat towards the door by which the comtesse had just gone out.

"Be accursed!" she hissed between her set teeth.

Her hand fell again to her side. She turned quickly, walked with unsteady steps across the room to the outer door, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

UNE MESSE NOIRE.

NIGHT had fallen over Paris.

A black pall of cloud veiled the moon's rays, and no breath of wind disturbed the still and sultry air. The streets were deserted and silent, and only here and there was a glimpse of light to be seen flickering in some casement window.

An hour after curfew a sedan chair with two bearers had stopped at the perfumer's shop in the Rue Beauregard, and set down a masked woman, who paid the bearers, entered the doorway, and disappeared. The bearers went away, evidently with no orders to return. The shop door and window were forthwith closed and shut up, and the single light which had been visible within it was extinguished. Since then the street had been in total darkness, and its solitude had been disturbed only by one or two late revelers staggering deviously to their homes.

Meanwhile, in a chamber of the perfumer's house, invisible from the outside of the building, a strange scene was being enacted.

The room was the same one which had been used two nights previously for the appeal to the auguries of the axe, the smoke, and the cup. But the curtain which had then formed one side of it was withdrawn, and it now appeared more than doubled in size. The ceiling, as before, was domed with a canopy of black which vanished into impenetrable darkness. The air of the room was heavy with incense.

In the newly shown portion of the apartment stood a table covered with a mattress. Against the end of the table there rested a *prie-dieu* chair upside down, and on the top of this was placed a cushion. At the same end of the table stood two lighted candles, one on each side, fixed in silver candlesticks.

Extended on the mattress, the head resting on the cushion and the face hidden by a mask of black velvet, was the nude form of a magnificently beautiful woman. An embroidered pall crossed the middle of her body, and fell down to the ground on each side of the table. On this pall rested a golden chalice, and a crucifix, reversed, lay on the woman's breast.

This woman, the living altar of the *messe noire*, was the comtesse de Valincour.

Behind the *prie-dieu* stood Marie Latour, dressed in black and swinging a smoking censer slowly to and fro. At the farther side of the altar was père Germont, his face still shaded by his monk's hood and dark spectacles, but wearing over his frock a chasuble of yellow embroidered in black with representations of fir-cones.

No one else was visible. But once or twice, when there came an interval of absolute silence, the sound of heavy breathing could be heard in the darkness at the farther end of the room.

The impious celebration was partly over. The pre-sanctified Host, brought by Germont from Ste. Marie Geneste in its bronze pyx, had been obscenely decorated according to the unnamable rites of the *messe noire*. The climax of the infernal sacrament was at hand.

A gong, struck by Latour, sent a solemn sound as of a funeral knell through the incense-laden air. Then she disappeared behind the black draperies at the end of the room, and the tapers flickered in the semi-darkness with the movement of her passing.

A minute later she returned. In her arms she carried the naked body of a child, a little boy, who breathed heavily and had evidently been stupefied by some powerful narcotic. She advanced to père Germont, and at a sign from him, laid the child on the long stool upon which the curé had from time to time been kneeling.

The curé knelt, kissed the altar, and rose, muttering the words:

“KYRIE ELEISON.
SATANAS ELEISON.
KYRIE ELEISON.”

Latour, standing as before by the *prie-dieu*, struck the gong a second time.

The curé murmured again.

“GLORIA TIBI, SATANAS. GLORIA IN EXCELSIS, ET BENEDICTIO, ET HONOR, ET POTESTAS IN SÆCULA SÆCULORUM.

“LAUDAMUS TE; BENEDICIMUS TE; ADORAMUS TE; GLORIFICAMUS TE. GRATIAS AGIMUS TIBI PROPTER MAGNAM GLORIAM TUAM. DOMINE DEUS, REX INFERNE, DEUS OMNIPOTENS, SUSCIPE DEPRECATIONEM NOSTRAM.”

Latour struck the gong a third time.

The sinister vibrations resounded through the gloom, and died away into silence. A shudder ran through the recumbent form on the altar, and the curé put forth his hand to steady the golden chalice. Then he looked towards Latour.

The woman stepped back to a little side-table on which the pyx was resting, and took up a knife.

At this moment a moth, winging its devious flight round the chamber, struck against one of the candles and extinguished it.

Latour gave a little gasp, and let fall the knife. The priest signed to her angrily to relight the candle, and waited with impatience while she endeavored, with shaking fingers, to obey him. The comtesse, after the single shudder which had passed through her frame when the gong had sounded the third time, remained motionless.

The priest bent down, raised the body of the child in his arms, and muttered,

“TE IGITUR, CLEMENTISSIME DOMINE, SUPPLICES ROGAMUS AC PETIMUS, UTI ACCEPTA HABEAS ET BENEDICAS HÆC DONA, HÆC MUNERA, HÆC SACRIFICIA ILLIBATA QUÆ TIBI OFFERIMUS.”

He lifted the body higher, and said in a louder voice,

“*Great Lord! accept, I conjure thee, the sacrifice I now offer of this child in return for the grace I am about to ask of thee.*”

He signed to Latour, and the gong was struck for the last time. The woman stepped forward, and held out the knife.

The priest held the child's body over the altar, took the knife from Latour, and with a rapid sweep cut its throat.

The blood spouted forth into the chalice, overflowed it,

and ran down over the body of the comtesse. The child expired without a movement or a sound.

The priest signed again to Latour. She came forward unsteadily, looked at the child's body for a moment, and then took it from the priest's arm to lay it on the side-table.

The priest raised the brimming chalice aloft, and said in a hoarse whisper:

"HIC EST ENIM CALIX SANGUINIS MEI."

He dipped his fingers in the blood, made with it the sign of a pentacle on the breast of the comtesse, and emptied half of the contents of the chalice on the altar. Then he murmured,

"OREMUS. Let us pray."

Latour came to the *prie-dieu*, and whispered in the ear of madame de Valincour. Then the comtesse, speaking for the first time, uttered the words,

"I pray."

The priest closed his hands, and prayed,

"Satanas, Lord of life and of death, Prince of the Air, Acceptor of blood, hear the prayer of this thy servant Yvonne du Fresne de Beauval, comtesse de Valincour."

"Grant that the love of him who is called the chevalier de Starhemberg may pass from his betrothed wife, that she may become hateful and loathsome to him, and that his love may be fixed upon thy servant Yvonne for ever and ever. AMEN."

The comtesse echoed almost inaudibly,

"Amen."

The priest held the half-empty chalice over the altar while Latour brought the paten from the side-table. He crumbled the remaining fragments of the Host into the cup, and spat into it. Then he emptied the cup over the body of the comtesse, and blew out the two candles.

There was a moment of profound silence, and then through the darkness there came the words of the priest, faint as if chanted from a distance,

"ITÈ. MISSA EST."

The *messe noire* was ended.

Latour struck a light with flint and steel, and lit a little lamp on the side-table. The priest had disappeared, and the two women were left alone.

Latour threw a cloth over the body of the child, and pinched with her fingers the red wick of one of the candles, which was mingling its acrid fumes with the incense of the thick air. Then she took up a long cloak, and stood by the side of the altar.

"Rise, madame," she said, as she held out the cloak.

The comtesse raised herself, flung away the pall stretched across her, and stepped on to the floor. Her nude form gleamed pallidly in the dim light of the little lamp, and her eyes glittered from behind the black velvet mask.

"At last!" she breathed to herself, with a deep-drawn sigh.

Latour wrapped her in the cloak, and the two women went out of the room.

A quarter of an hour later Latour returned alone to the scene of the *messe noire*. She carried a bag containing rouleaux of gold which she threw carelessly on the mattress. At the same moment the priest, divested of his yellow robe, appeared at an opening between the curtains, and came forward.

"She has gone?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And the money?"

Latour pointed to the bag on the mattress. The priest grasped it eagerly, untied it, and began to count the rouleaux.

"Light one of those absurd candles," he said brusquely.

The woman obeyed in silence, and the priest went carefully over the rouleaux, dividing them into two parts.

"Here is your share," he said finally.

The woman shook her head.

"Keep it yourself," she said. "I want none of it."

"None of it?"

"None."

"Are you serious?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Take it all," she replied. "I have no use for it. You have."

"*Diable!* I should say so," returned the priest. "Well, my dear Marie, I accept without ceremony—none the less readily because, as it happens, I have to live the rest of

my life in the next six months, and the money will help me to do it to some purpose."

"I do not understand you."

"No? You have not suspected?"

"Suspected what?"

"Lift up that candle, my dear Marie, and you will see."

Latour, with rather a surprised air, took the lighted candle from the mattress and lifted it up. Père Germont put aside his dark spectacles, turned back the deep hood from his face, and stood in front of the light.

For a moment Latour gazed at him in bewilderment. Then her eyes dilated, her face became livid with terror, and her lips parted with a strangled shriek.

The priest, with a hideous smile, advanced his face a little nearer.

"Well?" he asked.

The woman dropped the candle, and shrank back to the wall in an agony of horror and unspeakable loathing, with her hand raised as if to ward off some frightful apparition.

"Oh! my God! my God!" she gasped. "Don't touch me! don't touch me!"

Père Germont laughed. Latour's eyes closed, and she slid down the wall to the floor in a swoon.

The priest replaced his spectacles, and pulled the hood over his face again. After securing the rouleaux in a belt which he wore round his waist under his monk's frock, he put the sacramental vessels up in a large wallet. Then he glanced for a moment at the unconscious form of Latour lying in a heap on the floor, shrugged his shoulders, and was gone.

CHAPTER XL.

A CONFESSION.

G WYNETT had been unable to see lord Stair through the latter's absence from Paris on a short visit to a friend in Touraine. As the regent was a good deal engaged at Vincennes, and M. de Torcy's return was still delayed, Gwynett spent a portion of his time with Dr. Vidal, and the rest in riding about the country. The day following the celebration of the *messe noire* at the Rue Beauregard, he returned to Paris about sunset, and had just joined the regent when M. d'Argenson was announced.

"I am sorry to disturb you so late, monseigneur," said the lieutenant-general of police, "but a matter has cropped up requiring an immediate decision."

"Let it wait till after supper, comte," replied the regent, "unless you can eat and tell me at the same time."

"By all means," replied d'Argenson. "I can rely on the chevalier's discretion, I know."

"Then come to supper," said the regent.

The meal was served in the regent's cabinet, orders were given to admit no one, and the servants withdrew.

"And now, what is your business, my dear comte?" asked the regent, attacking his meal with a fine appetite.

"Do you recollect the La Voysin affair, monseigneur?"

"Scarcely—you know I was only half a dozen years old at the time. But of course the matter is familiar to me. What of it?"

"I have been suspecting for some time past that all that sort of thing has been getting into vogue again, but there has been nothing I could lay my hands upon. To-day, however, I have an actual case."

"Serious?"

"Nothing could be more so. A *messe noire* on an elaborate scale—in fact, quite à la Montespan."

"What! with a sacrifice?"

"Yes."

"A child butchered?"

"Decidedly. The celebrations held for madame de Montespan between 1667 and 1678, as recorded by the *chambre ardente* and my predecessor, La Reynie, seem to have been followed in every detail."

"Good heavens! this is shocking. How did you learn it?"

"Curiously enough, by the confession of one of the chief culprits—a woman. She came to me to-day in such a matter-of-fact way that at first I put her down for a lunatic. She denounced herself and another by name, but refused to mention either the celebrant or the person who ordered the *messe*. The awkward thing is that the person she denounced is our executioner for Paris."

"Sanson?" asked Gwynett.

"The same, chevalier. You know the man, if I recollect right."

"Yes. Your news strikes me as being very improbable, M. le comte. He is an ass, if you like, but not in the least a man to share in such a crime. In fact, he rather prides himself upon being a freethinker."

"He is accused of providing the candles or tapers used in the ceremony. It appears they have to be made of the fat of a *pendu*, and naturally he would be able to meet the requirements of the case."

"Well, what have you done?" asked the regent.

"My agents are watching for Sanson's return to Paris to-night from Mantes. As regards the woman, I let her go."

"*Diable!*"

"Yes—for three reasons. In the first place she positively refused to make any further confession until she was confronted with Sanson. Secondly, she is so desperately in earnest about giving herself up, that I was satisfied to keep watch over her shop in the Rue Beauregard. And thirdly, I wished to consult you about the affair as a whole. You see it is a thing altogether outside the usual course of justice—the kind of crime is exceptional, and judging by past experience we shall unearth frightful scandals. The question is, are we to

proceed on our own account, or should we decide at once to have a special tribunal? And is the fact of the inquiry to be known, or shall we try to preserve absolute secrecy? For my part, I told the woman to hold her tongue until she was asked to speak, and I am satisfied she will do so."

The regent went on with his meal reflectively.

"This may after all be only an isolated case," he suggested. "If so, the less fuss made the better. Under any circumstances I think publicity should be avoided."

"Then do you propose a special tribunal, monseigneur?"

"Not yet. Let us see how this affair turns out. Do all the examining yourself, in private, and report to me."

At this moment a knock came at the door of the cabinet, and the regent's secretary, the abbé Tésu, entered with a note.

"Monseigneur," he said, "one of M. d'Argenson's people has asked that this letter may be delivered to him immediately."

The abbé retired, and d'Argenson opened the letter.

"Sanson has returned," he said. "The house is watched on all sides, and he can be arrested at any moment."

"Where does he live?" asked the regent.

"No 8, in the Rue St. Louis."

"So near?"

The regent looked at his watch. It was about nine o'clock.

"I feel disposed to hear the development of this affair at first hand," he remarked. "If Sanson is in his house, let us send for the woman at once, and confront them there. Then there need be nothing to attract attention—no arrest, nothing to make the people in the street any the wiser."

"I see no objection to that," replied d'Argenson. "My chief exempt is one of those now in the Rue St. Louis, and he can act as secretary for us."

"Will you be present, chevalier?" asked the regent, turning to Gwynett.

"Willingly, monseigneur—if only because, should things go badly with Sanson, I shall wish to look after his little

son until those people at Nonancourt are consulted about the matter. I take it they are his only relatives."

"Very good. Then, comte, you had better send a closed carriage at once to bring away that woman from the Rue Beauregard to Sanson's house. The chevalier and I will walk there to save time."

D'Argenson went off to make the arrangements suggested, while the regent and Gwynett finished their supper and, after putting on their hats and cloaks, set out for the Rue St. Louis.

Arrived there, they found d'Argenson with one of the exempts who had been keeping watch over the house, and he came to speak to the regent.

"Sanson has only this moment entered the house," he explained. "It appears he has been gossiping on the doorstep until now with some acquaintance. We are going to demand admittance."

At a sign from d'Argenson the exempt knocked at the door of No. 8. No one came to open it, and the exempt, putting his ear to listen, could hear Sanson's voice, inside, scolding some person with the full force of his lungs. The exempt was about to knock again, when the door opened and the old servant, Margotin, came out hurriedly, followed by Sanson, who looked very much out of temper. Margotin went off down the street, and Sanson noticed the exempt, who was standing close by.

"A word with you, M. Sanson," said the exempt. "These three gentlemen wish to see you for a few minutes. May they come in?"

"Certainly," replied Sanson politely. "Do me the favor to enter, messieurs."

At a sign from the exempt, d'Argenson, followed by the regent and Gwynett, came up and entered the house. A second agent strolled up from a neighboring doorway, and took the place of the first in the street near the house.

Sanson recognized the three gentlemen successively with a good deal of surprise. But he ushered the party, without any comment, into the long room on the ground floor already spoken of, and placed a lamp on the table by the window. The moonlight shone in across the room, and added its radiance to the not very brilliant illumination of the lamp.

Sanson drew up for the visitors four of the six chairs which the room contained, and asked the regent respectfully,

"What can I do for you, monseigneur?"

The regent nodded to d'Argenson, who took a parcel of documents from his pocket, laid them on the table, and replied,

"We are waiting the arrival of another person, M. Sanson, in order to proceed with our business. Be good enough to excuse our beginning until then."

Sanson looked a little puzzled, but replied,

"As you please, M. le comte."

The regent waved his hand, and at the sign Sanson seated himself on one of the remaining chairs. He had however hardly done so when a carriage was heard to stop outside the house. Then came the sound of footsteps in the passage, and after a knock at the door it was opened and two exempts ushered in Marie Latour.

The woman stopped on seeing Sanson, and an indescribable expression flitted for a moment over his features. One of the exempts closed the door behind her and came forward to whisper to d'Argenson, who sat a little way apart from the regent and Gwynett.

"Were you observed?" asked d'Argenson of the exempt aside.

"No, monsieur. All was quiet. But, between ourselves, I doubt whether the woman is in her proper senses."

D'Argenson shrugged his shoulders, and turned to the regent, who nodded his head as a signal to begin.

"Marie Latour," commenced the lieutenant-general of police, "you have demanded to be confronted with Charles Sanson de Longval, with a view to furthering the ends of justice. He is here. What have you to say?"

"*Diable!*" growled Sanson under his breath, "this is the animal who objects to betraying people!"

Latour was silent for a moment, and then addressed d'Argenson in a hard, constrained voice.

"Monsieur," she said, "I accuse myself of taking part in a *messe noire*. I accuse Charles Sanson de Longval of aiding this *messe noire* by providing two tapers made of the fat of a *pendu*."

The exempt at the table took down the woman's words, and d'Argenson signed to Sanson to stand up.

"What have you to say to that?" he asked.

"Monsieur," replied Sanson, angrily, "it is true that this woman came to me for such a pair of candles as she speaks of, and that I agreed to furnish them. But this is the first I have heard of a *messe noire*. She said they were wanted for a conjuration, or some such *bêtise*—let her deny that, if she dare."

The woman replied, without looking at Sanson—

"I do not deny it."

The exempt at the table made a record of this.

"Continue your statement," said d'Argenson.

"Monsieur, I was asked by one of my customers to arrange for her a *messe noire*, and I consented. The candles were given to my customer by Charles Sanson. I myself secured a celebrant, who was able to provide the sacramental vessels and the Host. Further, I myself found the child who is sacrificed in the *messe*."

A shudder went through more than one of the listeners as the woman, in a hard, unmoved voice, made this avowal.

"Go on," said d'Argenson.

"The *messe* took place last night, in my house, according to strict rule. Towards its close the child was sacrificed, and its blood used for the chalice. The body is still in the room."

There was a moment of horrified silence, and then d'Argenson said,

"This confession is incomplete. Who is the celebrant, and who is your customer?"

"Monsieur, I shall not name the celebrant."

D'Argenson frowned and looked at the regent. Then he turned again to Latour.

"Who is the customer?" he asked.

"Monsieur, I may or may not name the customer—later."

"What was her object in having the *messe* celebrated?"

"To win a lover, monsieur."

"Was the lover mentioned?"

"Yes, monsieur. But I shall not name him—at present."

"Do you know him?"

"I have only heard him spoken of, monsieur."

"Do you make any further accusation against Charles Sanson?"

"No, monsieur."

"Do you accuse him of knowing the full purpose for which the candles were required?"

"No, monsieur."

"But you told him it was for a ceremony of sorcery?"

"That is so, monsieur."

"That is sufficient. Charles Sanson de Longval, you are arrested for complicity in sorcery and necromantic practices, and for perverting the functions of your office."

Sanson shrugged his shoulders.

"As for the sorcery, monsieur, I regard all that as mere buffoonery. The *messe noire* is another affair altogether, but you see I knew nothing about that."

D'Argenson waved his hand, and Sanson crossed over behind him and stood between the two exempts. The woman Latour stood at a little distance from the table and from Sanson, and facing the rest of the party. D'Argenson turned to her again.

"You have confessed to one act of sorcery. Are you guilty of complicity in any others?"

"I have something, monsieur, to add to what I have said about myself and about that man. I have waited until he was able to hear me say it. Will monsieur permit me to speak to him, as I may not have another opportunity?"

"Not in private."

"I do not ask that."

"Well, say what you have to say."

The woman put her hand to her throat for a moment, and it could be seen to be trembling. Then she looked fixedly at Sanson, and drew a deep breath.

"Charles Sanson," she said, in a voice that seemed choking with some intense emotion, "I have an account against you, have I not? Listen to it. You have insulted me, neglected me, wearied of me and I have borne it. Not patiently—but, I have borne it. You have told me to my face that I have no longer the youth or the beauty you once admired. The love you swore to bear me has turned

to indifference. Mine for you you have despised and flung aside. All this I have borne. But did you suppose I would bear your transports of adoration for another woman, or above all that I should be driven to further your intrigue with her, and remain satisfied?"

She turned excitedly to the group at the table, and went on with raised voice and flashing eyes,

"Messieurs, this man, who had been for years my lover, to whom I had always been faithful, found out that the customer of mine who wished for a *messe noire* was young and beautiful—in fact, he had a day or two before seen her. When I sought his aid to provide the candles required for the *messe*, he compelled me—*me*—under threat of betraying the request to M. d'Argenson, to tell my customer that the price of the candles must be a visit to him that night. Ask him if I did not refuse—if I did not entreat him, threaten him, warn him! Ask him, messieurs!"

"Without doubt you did," assented Sanson.

Latour flashed round upon him.

"And you were merciless, were you not? Did I not tell you to pray that your bargain should be refused?"

"Something of the sort," replied Sanson, a little uncomfortably.

"And when it was accepted, did you dream that I—I, Marie Latour—would see myself flouted, scorned, outraged, and not revenge myself? Did you dream that you could rend my heart, blast my life, destroy my soul—and that it should cost you nothing but a smile or a sneer?"

The woman took a step forward, and her face assumed an expression of such demoniac hatred and triumph that Sanson recoiled in absolute terror.

"Fool! blind fool!" she hissed, "you yourself have put vengeance into my hands—and I have avenged myself! Wretch, live in the hell you have made for me, and whither I go to wait for you! Be accursed, for I have taken the light of all your life from you! Be accursed, for you are childless! Be accursed, for it was your son, your own son, whom I carried off to be sacrificed in the *messe noire*! Be accursed, for ever and ever!"

The woman stopped, breathless, foaming at the mouth, and almost delirious. The listeners at the table sat speech-



less, overcome with horror, while Sanson, dazed and livid, sank nearly fainting into the arms of the two exempts. He gasped for breath, tearing convulsively at his cravat, and a stifled groan burst from his bloodless lips. Then he suddenly raised himself, and before the exempts could lift a hand to stay him, sprang with the bound of a tiger at Latour's throat.

"Demon!" he yelled.

A frightful scene followed. The two exempts seized the woman and the man, and used their utmost efforts to free Latour from the deadly grip of the executioner. But the latter, possessed of the strength of a maniac, dragged all three hither and thither about the room as if they were so many puppets, while d'Argenson and the secretary tried in vain to assist the two exempts. The woman, already strangled, was held up by main force by her maddened assailant until one of his desperate struggles sent both of the exempts reeling against the wall behind him. The moment he was free Sanson, with a hoarse cry, swung Latour's body twice to and fro and then dashed it with all his force against the fire-place in the opposite wall. The woman's skull struck the stone bracket of the over-mantel. It was driven in like an egg-shell, and the mangled body fell with a dull thud across the hearthstone.

Sanson staggered, and stretched out his arms for guidance as if blinded. His hand came into contact with the back of one of the chairs, and he sank into it with a heart-breaking sob. His fury seemed in a moment to be spent and forgotten, his arms fell to his sides, and he burst into a storm of passionate weeping.

"Charlot!" he moaned. "My little Charlot! My pretty one!"

The group at the table exchanged glances, quite at a loss how to act. The two exempts leaned against the wall behind d'Argenson, recovering their breath and rubbing the bruises they had received in the struggle.

Nothing was said for a minute or two, and no one took the obviously useless step of doing anything to the dead body of Latour. Finally Sanson raised his head with an expression upon his face that was not without its pathetic dignity, and stood up.

"Monseigneur," he said, "I ask your pardon for giving

way thus in your presence. For the rest I am at the disposal of justice. Do what you like with me, and the sooner the better, for I have nothing left to live for."

"The law must take its ordinary course," put in d'Argenson drily.

Sanson turned to him impatiently.

"Good Lord! M. le comte," he exclaimed, "why plague yourself and me with formalities? I am here—you are all witnesses. Why delay? Do you imagine it will amuse me to be allowed time for meditation? In God's name, messieurs, finish the matter and let me be at rest!"

"I see no objection to that," remarked the regent. "Suppose, M. d'Argenson, we constitute this a court to try the prisoner for the crime he has committed before our eyes."

D'Argenson shrugged his shoulders, but without any further demur wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper.

"Charles Sanson de Longval," he recited, "you are accused of assisting in sorcery, of malfeasance in your office, and of murder—the latter offence being committed in the presence of monseigneur le régent and the rest of the persons now assembled here. Have you anything to say?"

"Nothing, monsieur, except to ask that my sentence may be carried out with as little delay as possible."

D'Argenson glanced at the regent, who turned to the executioner and asked,

"Do you urge any plea for leniency, monsieur?"

"No, monseigneur, nor do I ask for it."

The regent hesitated a moment, and then observed,

"Take time, monsieur. You may change your mind."

Sanson shook his head.

"You are very good, monseigneur. But the kindest thing you can do for me is to settle my business quickly."

"As you please," replied the regent. He turned to d'Argenson, and said,

"As the prisoner makes no appeal, the sentence is death."

"How soon, monseigneur?" asked Sanson.

"To-morrow, if you like."

"Thank you, monseigneur."

D'Argenson turned to the secretary.

"Record the proceedings," he said.

As the exempt's pen began to travel over the paper, the lamp on the table suddenly grew dim for want of oil, and d'Argenson remarked,

"We shall want a candle or two."

One of the other exempts crossed the room to lift down a tall candlestick which stood on the mantel shelf, containing a half-burnt candle. He passed it to the secretary, and while the latter was trying to light it at the failing lamp a little murmur of conversation arose. The regent exchanged a few words in a low tone with Gwynett, and the two exempts whispered to each other as they glanced sideways at the shapeless form lying in the fireplace.

Then there came a startled exclamation from d'Argenson, followed by a sudden silence throughout the room. The secretary looked up from the table, with the still unlighted candle in his hand, and almost let it fall in his surprise.

The door at the farther end of the room opened silently, unnoticed by the group at the table, and a broad band of moonlight, overpowering the feeble glimmer of the smouldering lamp, fell upon the opening into the dark passage beyond the *portières*.

On the top step in the doorway stood a shining figure, silent and motionless, upon which all eyes were fixed with amazement and even awe.

It was that of a little child, beautiful as an angel, draped in silvery white, with golden curls falling on his shoulders. His eyes surveyed the company with a calm and serious air, and every man held his breath as he gazed at the radiant vision.

There was a moment's pause, and then Sanson sank to his knees, his face transfigured with solemn rapture, and his arms extended to the white figure.

"It is his spirit," he whispered half to himself. "Be at peace, little one! Thou art avenged. All is well. Wait in patience, for to-morrow I come to join thee."

A look of surprise came over the child's face. Then he laughed delightedly, and bounded down the steps into Sanson's arms, shouting,

"My father! my father!"

The executioner's face turned grey with the shock, and his heart almost stopped beating. Then the truth dawned upon him, and he clasped the child frantically in his arms, smothering him with hysterical caresses as he swayed to and fro upon his knees.

CHAPTER XLI.

HOW M. SANSON WAS PAID FIVE LOUIS.

THE meeting of father and child was a scene which none of the half-dozen spectators could behold unmoved. Tears which he made no effort to conceal came into Gwynett's eyes, and for the first time since hearing Latour's atrocious confession he seemed to himself able to breathe freely. D'Argenson pushed back his chair, winked his eyes, and helped himself to an enormous pinch of snuff. The regent blew his nose vigorously, and then, looking towards the fire-place, caught sight of the body of Latour, by which a small pool of blood was slowly forming. He started slightly, and then, signing to one of the exempts, said sharply,

"Cover up that carrion."

The exempt looked about, and seeing nothing else available took off his surtout and spread it rather gingerly over the body, which had remained unnoticed by little Charlot.

The child himself, almost breathless from the violence of his father's embraces, began to prattle with cheerful disregard of the presence of the others.

"You are not cross with me, my father?" he asked. "Margotin was very cross."

"She found you, then?"

"Yes. I was at Justin's house. But he is not there. Where is Justin?"

Sanson started.

"Justin?" he ejaculated. "Good God! now I understand—it was——"

"Margotin brought me home," went on the child, "and made me go to bed without seeing you. She said you were busy. But I got up to find you," he added gleefully, "and I found you."

Sanson rose from his knees, carried the boy to the doorway, and set him down, kissing him as he did so.

"Go to bed now, little one," he said.

The child went off obediently, and his white figure disappeared into the darkness. The secretary had by this time lighted the candle, and he looked inquiringly at his chief while Sanson came slowly back to the table.

"In this respect, M. Sanson," remarked the regent, "it appears, happily, that Latour's confession was false."

"She did not know that, I feel sure, monseigneur. I am satisfied she was misled—by a miracle of good fortune."

"How?"

"Monseigneur, I should like to ask M. d'Argenson if his police found any clothes, such as a child would wear, at Latour's house?"

One of the exempts who had brought Latour in the carriage came forward, and replied,

"Monseigneur, there was a little suit of blue velvet, which we took to belong to the child whose body is still there."

"That is it," said Sanson. "She gave that suit the other day to my little boy, whom she did not know by sight. I would not let him wear it, but passed it on to a little playmate of his who was called Justin. Without doubt, monseigneur, she came after Charlot while I was absent at Mantes, and took away Justin by mistake."

"A patient of Dr. Vidal's," explained Gwynett to the regent. "It is perhaps some consolation to know that this poor Justin was incurably diseased, and Dr. Vidal had no hope of his living more than two or three months."

"We are forgetting one thing," put in d'Argenson, "and that is that M. Sanson has murdered this woman Latour for nothing at all, so far as he is concerned."

This exposition recalled the executioner to a sense of the position in which he was placed by his trial and sentence, and he looked blankly at his judges.

"I had forgotten," he said despondently. "Never mind. The little one lives—that is everything. And I have seen him once again."

The regent interposed with a question to d'Argenson.

"Is the carriage still at the door?" he asked.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Then let your two exempts take away that woman."

"To her house?"

"Anywhere you like."

D'Argenson nodded to the exempts, the ghastly heap of humanity was carried away, and the door closed upon it. The regent turned again to Sanson, who still stood before the table.

"You may now, perhaps, wish to say something about your sentence, M. Sanson."

"Monseigneur, it is true things have changed—for me, at all events. I was wrong, it appears. But it was natural to believe that woman's story, and now you have all seen my little Charlot, messieurs, I ask any one of you what you would have done in my place?"

The regent whispered to Gwynett,

"What would one of your juries in England think of that for a plea, chevalier?"

"Monseigneur, I think they would be stupid enough to acquit him."

"*Diable!* you are right, and I can be as stupid as anybody when I choose."

He turned to Sanson, and asked,

"When you have acted in your official capacity, M. Sanson, what have been your fees?"

The executioner looked rather surprised at the question, but replied,

"M. d'Argenson will tell you, monseigneur, that for ordinary hangings I receive five louis a head."

D'Argenson nodded.

"And for beheading ten louis. For burning alive, or breaking on the wheel, or hanging with drawing and quartering, the fee has always been twenty louis."

"Yes," assented d'Argenson. "And it is very dear."

This reflection upon the value of his professional services filled the executioner with indignation.

"Dear!" he echoed. "Tell me, M. d'Argenson, would you like to disembowel people for less than twenty louis a head?"

"Good heavens! no," ejaculated d'Argenson unguardedly.

"Very well, then," retorted Sanson, with the air of a man who had quite obviously got the best of an argument.

"There is something in that, d'Argenson," remarked

the regent. "M. Sanson is an artist, and we cannot be picturesque at La Grève for nothing. Let me see your secretary's memorandum."

The secretary handed over the record he had made of the proceedings before they were interrupted by the appearance of little Charlot. The regent glanced over it, and tore it up.

"Let us put things in another way," he said. "Write, M. le secrétaire, that Marie Latour, having confessed to acts of sacrilege, sorcery, and assassination, was this day sentenced to death, and duly executed in our presence by the exécuteur des hautes œuvres du roi, and that the usual fee of five louis has been paid to him therefor."

The regent put his hand in his pocket, took out five louis d'or, and pushed them across the table to Sanson.

"But, monseigneur——" objected the lieutenant-general of police.

"Pooh! my dear fellow, you must allow me to be economical now and then. In the ordinary course of things I suppose the woman, Latour would have been burnt alive at La Grève, which would have cost us twenty louis—so that M. Sanson has saved us fifteen. There is nothing to grumble at in that."

Sanson looked at the golden coins with a certain irresolution.

"Monseigneur," he said, "I thank you for your clemency. But as regards this money, it would go against the grain to take it—especially as it appears I did poor Marie a little injustice."

"You can use it for Justin's burial," suggested Gwynett.

"Very true, monsieur. I will accept it for that."

Sanson pocketed the money, and the regent went on.

"So much for that matter. But now, M. Sanson, we have something serious to deal with—the affair of the candles."

"Ah! monseigneur, there I confess I was in fault. But I was tempted, I assure you."

"Every crime has that excuse, I suppose."

"Monseigneur, permit me to demur to the word 'crime.' I think the point is arguable."

"Argue it then, monsieur."

"Well, monseigneur, the bodies of the *pendus* are my perquisite, and I am allowed to sell them to the relatives. If I may sell the whole body, I submit to you, monseigneur, that I may sell a part, according to the axiom of M. Euclid that the greater includes the less. And if I may sell, surely I may give away?"

"Not for purposes of sorcery," objected d'Argenson.

"M. le comte, the only sorcery I suspected was a farrago of nonsense, which I ridiculed."

"That is quite possible," said the regent. "But it does not alter the fact that making candles out of people without their consent is taking a great liberty. In my case, for instance—supposing M. du Maine happened to get his own way and hand me over to M. Sanson——"

The lieutenant-general of police looked up perfectly scandalized.

"Really, monseigneur——" he protested.

"Tut! tut! we are not talking in the middle of the street. As I was saying, if it became M. Sanson's duty to hang me, it would annoy me excessively to be put into a candlestick afterwards. I do not forget that I am getting stout, and the idea adds a new terror to corpulency. On the whole, M. Sanson, I think you are decidedly to blame in this matter."

"Monseigneur, I admit that I was indiscreet."

"It must be understood that it does not occur again, monsieur—temptation or no temptation."

"Rest assured, monseigneur, that nothing of the sort is possible."

The regent put on his hat, and looked at d'Argenson.

"I think, comte, that we have done everything that is necessary."

"It is very irregular," grumbled d'Argenson. "And M. Sanson's precipitancy has deprived us of a most important piece of information. Thanks to him, we do not know the name of the person who paid for the *messe*, and I think he is bound to assist us in finding it out."

Sanson made a wry face at this suggestion.

"M. le comte," he said, "it is true I saw the lady—twice, in fact. But I have not the slightest idea who she may be, or even whether she belongs to Paris."

"Nevertheless, if you saw her again, you would recognize her?"

"M. le comte, permit me to say that it might turn out very inconveniently if I did recognize her, and said so. I have heard that the fat was in the fire more than once in La Voysin's time, through a little too much being found out."

"That is all very well. But we have missed the celebrant, too, the actual murderer."

"As to him, M. le comte, I know absolutely nothing. And seeing that Latour refused to name him, why, monsieur, if you had any conception of that woman's obstinacy——"

The regent rose, and gathered his cloak round him.

"It is getting late," he said. "These details can be gone into another time. I need not urge upon all present that nothing must transpire of what has occurred to-night."

At a sign from d'Argenson, the secretary took up his papers, and went out as an advance guard. The regent followed with d'Argenson, and Gwynett brought up the rear. As they were passing through the hall, Sanson whispered in Gwynett's ear,

"M. le chevalier, permit me to say a word to you."

"What is it?" asked Gwynett.

"Monsieur, if I did not choose to give any information to monseigneur le régent, it was because he knows every pretty woman in Paris, and it might be embarrassing for him to have one of his acquaintances burnt alive at La Grève. But for you, M. le chevalier, I have a little hint to give. If you happen to meet the most beautiful woman you can imagine, and you see two little moles behind her right ear, one above the other—then you will know it is the lady of the *messe noire*."

"I devoutly hope it will never happen," replied Gwynett, as he passed on to rejoin the regent.

At the street door the party separated, and the regent returned to the Palais-Royal with Gwynett. Sanson shut the door on his self-invited guests, and went back to extinguish the light in the room they had just left.

"All's well that ends well," he reflected philosophically. "Perhaps after all I was a little hasty with poor Marie."

She was severely devoted to me, without question, and that sort of thing gets very wearisome in time. Nevertheless, I was hasty, I admit."

He took the candle from the table, and was leaving the room when he stopped opposite the fire-place, his eyes caught by the crimson stain which had spread about near the hearthstone.

"What a mess!" he ejaculated ruefully. "I must have that got rid of, or Charlot will be asking questions. It was lucky he saw nothing."

CHAPTER XLII.

AN INVITATION.

EARLY the next morning Gwynett took an opportunity, which had not conveniently presented itself before, of recounting to the regent the circumstances of Gaultier's suicide, and of the attacks the abbé had made upon his life at different times. To all of this the regent listened with a good deal of surprise.

"I presume madame de Valincour knows nothing of this last affair," he remarked. "Do you propose to tell her?"

"No, monseigneur. Neither M. Gaultier's nor my own share in these matters was one I care to bring under her notice, and so far as I am concerned I would prefer that the news of her brother's death reached her from some other source. It would be quite easy for captain Kermode to report that his passenger was lost in the wreck of the schooner, without going into any details."

"Probably you are right, chevalier. *Certes*, your silence at present would save madame de Valincour and yourself from any little embarrassment on the score of M. l'abbé's perseverance in the rôle of assassin. I take it there were no papers or property of his saved from the wreck?"

"None. I asked about that. He came on board with a valise, but it must either have been blown up with the poop-cabin, or washed overboard when we struck."

A little later lord Stair was announced, and he greeted Gwynett very warmly, expressing his regret that his absence from Paris had prevented an earlier meeting. Gwynett inquired after the countess and her son, and found that both were doing exceedingly well.

"The countess hopes you will not leave Paris without her seeing and thanking you personally, chevalier. By the way, you will be glad to hear that I have had your pardon from the crown in my desk for the last three days. I ought to have sent word to monseigneur le régent when it arrived, but I forgot at the moment. The

long delay in sending it was lucky in one respect, in that it enabled me to report the actual return to England of Mr. Dorrington, the supposed victim. I had heard of that from M. de Torcy. Naturally, that settled the business."

"I am greatly indebted for your help in the matter, my lord. But I shall still be glad of your good offices to have my friend Wray and myself secured against any proceedings arising out of the recent insurrection."

"You found your friend, then?"

"Yes, and induced him at once to sever his connection with the Jacobite rising. Unfortunately we were both taken prisoners and robbed of your safe-conducts before we could get back to England. The fact that we escaped again does not enable us to show ourselves in public in England—hence my call at your hôtel on my arrival here."

"You may consider all that settled, chevalier. I will send you the pardon and the other papers at once. May I ask if you now resume your own name?"

"When I return to England, my lord. It is hardly worth while troubling people here with the explanations which any change would involve. Apart from that, it happens to be a convenient juncture for my re-baptism, for amongst some letters which I have found awaiting me here was one from my uncle the baron von Starhemberg. It appears there is now a genuine chevalier de Starhemberg, six months old, who has put my nose out of joint. Thus it is high time for me to become Ambrose Gwynnett again."

After some further chat, Dubois entered and the ambassador went away.

The abbé was now informed, of course for the first time, of Gwynnett's change of name and of the intended resumption of his proper one.

"That is now no secret, then, M. le chevalier?" he asked.

"No secret, M. l'abbé. But you will see I should have to explain myself to death if the story got about before I leave Paris. So I rely on your discretion."

"*Certes*," said the abbé. "But milord Stair will probably let the cat out of the bag all the same, for the benefit of the lion-hunters."

"I am going to keep the chevalier all day in the laboratory as a precaution," said the regent. "But he will have to defend himself from his own resources to-night, as I have to be at Vincennes again."

The abbé in his turn went away, and the regent spent the greater part of the day with Gwynett in the laboratory. The two dined alone together after the day's experimentation was concluded, and while at the table a note was brought to Gwynett from madame de Valincour. It ran:

"DEAR M. LE CHEVALIER,

"The few details which monseigneur has given me of your recent adventures have filled me with curiosity to hear more. If your leisure permits you to waste an hour or two in enacting the part of romancer for my benefit, I shall be at home this evening.

"YVONNE DE VALINCOUR."

Gwynett bethought him that the regent had spoken of going to Vincennes that night. He connected this circumstance with the comtesse's invitation, and looked at the note in his hand with a certain indefinable suspicion. Finally, he passed it across the table to the regent, and asked carelessly,

"Have you any message for madame la comtesse, monseigneur?"

The regent glanced at the note, and replied with perfect indifference,

"Do not let the comtesse tire you to death, chevalier. Your stories are really more entertaining than M. Galland's—as I think I remarked before—and you will be made to talk forever. *A propos* of M. Galland, the comtesse must show you her boudoir, which she has furnished on the model of his 'Arabian Nights.' For myself, I shall continue to prefer Paris to Bagdad until I can find a Mesrour and a Giafar to take the place of all my imbecile councils of state."

Gwynett had promised to spend an hour with Dr. Vidal, and took his departure to keep that appointment before calling upon the comtesse de Valincour. A few minutes after he had left, Dubois entered the regent's cabinet

with his hands full of despatches, and sat down without ceremony to help himself to coffee.

"M. de Torcy returns to-night, I find," he announced. "His steward has just come on in advance to the hôtel Croissy."

"All the better," replied the regent. "M. de Starhemberg is waiting to see him, as you know."

"Yes. It was madame de Lavalaye who gave me the news, and I asked her to tell the marquis that the chevalier was here. She was at madame de Valincour's."

"You saw the comtesse, then?"

"For a few minutes only—I came away when madame de Lavalaye arrived. Curiously enough the comtesse happened to ask me what was M. de Starhemberg's Christian name. I told her I had only known it half an hour, and as it is not now a dead secret I took it she might as well know his surname as well."

"Ah! you spoke of that?"

"Merely the fact. I said the chevalier could tell her his story better than I could."

"I suppose nothing has reached her ears about this *messe noire* business? She used to be a pretty regular customer of the woman Latour."

"No. Evidently the affair has been quite hushed up."

The abbé finished his coffee, and busied himself with his despatches, handing one occasionally across the table for the perusal of the regent.

The latter ruminated over what had been said by the abbé.

"I should rather like to know," he said to himself, "if the worthy Gaultier took his sister into his confidence respecting his various attempts to murder M. Gwynett. If he did, it will be a little curious. For she knows now, what she could not have known before, that the chevalier de Starhemberg of her acquaintance and the Ambrose Gwynett whom her brother found so much in the way are one and the same person. If she were a Corsican, now, that would make it healthier for the chevalier not to accept the invitation she sent just now. And if she is not a Corsican, she comes from Languedoc, which is next door."

CHAPTER XLIII.

SILENT WITNESSES.

WHEN Gwynett, an hour or two later, was ushered into the Arabesque boudoir of madame de Valincour's hôtel, he looked round with astonishment and admiration.

A munificent present from the dey of Algiers to the regent, consisting of gold and silver vessels, inlaid Saracenic furniture, and embroidered hangings, had originally suggested to the comtesse the idea of having an Oriental apartment, and in its development she had had the assistance of the famous Orientalist and translator of "The Thousand and One Nights," M. Antoine Galland. The result was a scene into which Haroun Alraschid and Zobeide might have wandered without finding themselves very much out of place.

A floor of white marble with tessellated borders was strewn with Persian and Indian rugs, couches and sofas heaped up with enormous satin cushions occupied three sides of the room, and vases of porcelain filled with palms and flowers stood in each corner. The domed ceiling was canopied with blue silk, embroidered with stars, and the sandal-wood fretwork of the walls was studded with sparkling facets of amethyst and chrysoprase. A little fountain of perfumed water rose from the silver stem of an alabaster basin in the middle of the room, and splashed back into a miniature tank in the marble floor, in which goldfish darted hither and thither, and white blooms of nenuphars floated on the wavelets. Half a dozen Moorish lamps threw a subdued rose-colored light around the room, and the open windows were draped with netted hangings of beadwork, which rustled softly when the warm air of the summer night swayed them to and fro.

Gwynett was left alone for two or three minutes after the door by which he had entered had been noiselessly

closed behind him. Facing him was another doorway with *portières*. Presently these were parted, and the comtesse stood in the opening.

She wore a dress of Indian silk, less Oriental than classic in its fashion, and her shoulders were wreathed with a filmy draping of gossamer-like lace in many folds. Closing the door behind the *portières*, she came forward and greeted her guest with a ravishing smile.

"Ah, M. le chevalier! You have come delightfully early—thank you for being good enough to excuse my unceremonious note. You have not seen my boudoir before, I believe. Criticise it, please."

Gwynett expressed his very genuine admiration of the room and its contents, and added,

"Of course, madame, I saw the Alhambra while I was in Spain, and studied it with much interest. That enables me in some small measure to appreciate the knowledge and taste displayed in the arrangements of this room. Certainly I have nowhere seen anything so luxurious and at the same time so charming. Only it makes one feel inclined to apologize for not appearing in a turban and burnous, or the garb of the Commander of the Faithful."

"I accept your compliments on behalf of M. Galland, to whom they are solely due, M. le chevalier."

The comtesse seated herself among the cushions at one end of a double sofa, and motioned to Gwynett to follow her example.

"Rather curiously, chevalier," she said, "I heard this afternoon from M. Dubois that you have been mystifying us all this time about your real name—doubtless for excellent reasons, although the abbé did not mention them. I do not wish to be indiscreet, and only refer to the matter now in order that I may know how you prefer to be called?"

"It is quite immaterial, madame. Both in Paris and at Munich I have been called so habitually by my uncle's name that it has become second nature to me. But recent circumstances have made it undesirable for me to use it—in England, at all events."

"And your real name is——?"

"Ambrose Gwynett, madame."

The comtesse remained silent a moment, evidently casting about in her memory.

"Chevalier, the name seems not unknown to me. But I cannot call to mind when or where I heard it."

Gwynett was not at all desirous of assisting the comtesse's recollection, and accordingly replied,

"Very probably, madame, it was used inadvertently by M. de Torcy or one of M. Dauguerre's family. They all knew me first under that name."

"Possibly. But if you have no objection, I find it easier to call you chevalier, as I have always done."

"By all means, madame."

The comtesse smiled, and dismissed the subject from her mind.

"You have had some lucky escapes lately, chevalier, according to monseigneur's account of you. It would have made me very uncomfortable if I had known the risks you were running. Would you be astonished, chevalier, if I told you I have very few friends, and that I have always flattered myself I might consider you among the very elect?"

"I find that difficult to believe, madame."

"Why, chevalier? You must have been rather accustomed to ingratitude, one would think. Do you suppose I should forget that our acquaintance began with your saving my life?"

"Madame, I am ashamed to be reminded of such a trifle."

"Ah, chevalier! that is not complimentary."

"Or I should say, madame, that you overrate the merit of a service which anyone could and would have rendered quite as readily as myself."

"It is clear, chevalier, that you derive no special satisfaction from the fact that it was I in particular to whom the service was rendered."

"Nay, madame, you have always been too kind for that."

The comtesse fixed her splendid eyes upon Gwynett, and replied, with a shade of reproach in her tone,

"You have never been forward to receive any kindness from me, chevalier. Why is that?"

"Madame, you have many demands upon your time. It

it no secret that you interest yourself in public affairs, and that you are more devoted to politics than society."

"That is partly true. But society is one thing, and the companionship of one's dearest friends another. Apparently it has not been worth your while, chevalier, to draw that distinction."

Gwynnett recognized that the conversation was becoming very direct.

"All this is not said for nothing," he debated within himself. "Let us see what is expected of me."

He replied with a smile,

"Ah, madame! you affect to blame me for not venturing on a hardihood which you would have been the first to resent had I presumed so far on your indulgence."

"You have studied me very ill, chevalier, if you have not discovered that I am of a forgiving disposition."

The comtesse raised herself, unwound and threw aside her wrap, and leaned back again upon her cushions. It could now be seen that she was wearing only a sort of Greek robe of soft Tussore silk, opening widely from the throat nearly to the waist, and girdled there with a narrow belt of embroidered silk. So attired, no odalisque of an Eastern seraglio could have more picturesquely unveiled before her lord the beauties of her face and form.

"Chevalier," she said, "will you do me the favor to fan me? The last few evenings have been warm enough for genuine 'Arabian Nights.'"

Gwynnett took the fan held out to him, and used it as had been requested, while the comtesse lay back with her eyes half closed and a smile of contentment upon her features.

"That is delicious," she murmured.

Gwynnett began to speculate seriously upon what was likely to be forthcoming.

"The deuce!" he thought, "I am afraid St. Anthony would have come off rather badly here. If all madame's male visitors are received in this fashion, monseigneur is not called 'Philippe le debonnaire' for nothing. On the other hand, if all this is for my special benefit, some diplomacy will be wanted to escape without a little fuss. I begin to suspect that I was an ass to come."

The comtesse looked round, and her eyes fell upon a stool near the sofa.

"Chevalier," she said, "I am sure it must tire your arm to fan me from where you are sitting. Please bring that stool, and sit nearer."

Gwynett did as directed, and placed the stool in the spot indicated by the finger of the comtesse. This was sufficiently close to her to be within reach of her hand. Gwynett resumed his fanning.

"It is quite clear," he said to himself, "that my capture is resolved upon. It is of no use expecting that we shall be interrupted—that will certainly have been provided against. I must wait till things get inconveniently pressing, and then have a fit or something. To pose as a Joseph would complicate matters furiously, and it would be embarrassing for monseigneur to have to choose between two contradictory and equally disagreeable stories—which is probably what it would end in."

The comtesse sat up, resting her arm on the cushions, and holding out the other hand for the fan.

"Many thanks, chevalier," she said, as she took it and laid it aside. "I will release you now—I am quite cool."

Gwynett made a movement to rise, but the comtesse stretched out her hand, and laid it on his shoulder.

"Please sit still, chevalier," she said, smiling. "I want to ask you another favor."

"What is it, madame?"

"I have heard from monseigneur that you have some curious gifts of one sort or another. Are you skilled in reading the lines of the hand? If so, tell me my fortune?"

She took her hand from his shoulder and placed it on his open palm with a gesture that was almost a caress.

"I have never studied the art, madame."

"I have. But the books on the subject are very obscure—to me, at all events."

The comtesse turned away her head at the moment to indicate by her glance a heap of quaint old volumes on a table near the sofa. Gwynett's eyes followed the glance, and then rested on the back of her head, where her hair was drawn up in Greek fashion into a massive coil over the nape of the neck.

It was the right side of her head which was towards him, and his eyes fell upon two little moles behind the ear, one above the other.

CHAPTER XLIV.

EUTHANASIA.

THE words which Sanson had whispered to him flashed through Gwynett's mind, and he could not avoid starting at the revelation.

"Good God!" he thought, "this is the woman of the *messe noire*!"

The comtesse turned her head quickly.

"You started then, chevalier—why?"

For a moment Gwynett could not find words to speak. Then, controlling himself with an effort, he replied,

"Madame, it was an inspiration. I think now I may perhaps be able to interpret the lines of your hand."

"That is charming. Please begin."

Gwynett bent over the comtesse's open palm.

"Madame, before I hazard a guess at the future, I ought to endeavor to decipher the past. Have I your permission?"

"Why not? But you do not need my hand for that."

"Madame, the hand is useful because it reveals not only the past and the future, but the character, the desires, the powers of the person to whom it belongs."

"You claim a good deal more than the average fortune-teller, chevalier, and I begin to be sceptical."

"Let us see, madame. In the lines of this hand I read great ambitions, great projects, great deeds."

"Go on."

"I read contempt for conventional scruples when they would hinder the steps you think necessary to carry out your plans. I read terrible resolves. I read frightful dangers encountered without hesitation or fear."

"Go on."

"Have I not said enough, madame?"

"Not if you can say anything more."

"It might displease you, madame."

"Do you think I am so easily displeased, chevalier?"

"I hesitate, madame."

The comtesse shrugged her shoulders.

"Confess, chevalier, that your revelations are exhausted."

"If you will it, madame."

"I do not will it. Go on, chevalier."

"Madame, I see a line here which speaks of blood."

The hand which Gwynett held in his own began to tremble slightly.

"Chevalier, it is certain that if you are not a magician, you have a wonderful knack of guessing."

Gwynett looked up at the comtesse, and found her eyes fixed upon his face with an indefinable expression in which anxiety, tenderness, and defiance seemed mingled together.

"And you say that all this is true?" she went on.

"Not in the least, madame. It is your hand that says so."

The comtesse remained silent so long that Gwynett remarked,

"I have offended you, madame, I fear."

The comtesse looked at him for a moment as if she had not heard the words, and then asked,

"What else, chevalier, does my hand tell you?"

"It tells me, madame, that to gain the end I spoke of it has dealt out death—death to the helpless, confiding, and innocent. How often, I cannot see—as yet. Shall I read further, madame?"

An expression of wonder and vague disquietude passed for a moment over the face of the comtesse, and she gave a little sigh.

"Strange!" she murmured, half to herself.

Then she suddenly leaned forward, grasped Gwynett's hand in both her own, and looked into his face with a yearning intentness which almost startled him.

"And if it were so, chevalier, should I therefore be hateful in your eyes?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Madame," cried Gwynett, reproachfully, "nothing could make you hateful."

"Not a crime. Not even many crimes?"

"No one should judge another, madame. Crime or no crime, you would always be what you are."

"Ah! chevalier, what a woman may be to one, or two, or

a hundred, is nothing. She will always ask, what is she to the man she loves? And none the less if she had loved for weeks and months and years without return and almost without hope—because to love thus, chevalier, is to be alone in the midst of throngs, to be defeated when most triumphant, to fail in spite of success almost beyond one's wildest dreams!"

"Doubtless it may be so, madame."

"Think, chevalier—that a woman who once, before she loved, may have been ambitious for herself, becomes doubly, trebly ambitious for her lover—that she yearns to offer him something that would make her more than herself, more than thousands of the highest in all lands, more than most women who wear crowns upon their brows. Think that for such a woman, with such ambition and such a love, crime is a word, and only a word. Death! What is death? How many deaths go to make the glory of a Condé, a Turenne, a Marlborough? Are a woman's ambition and a woman's love to stand still before a thing that every soldier laughs to scorn? Ah, chevalier! if you were loved by such a woman, and with such a love——"

The comtesse stopped, her voice breaking with passionate earnestness as she opened her arms and held them out towards Gwynett with a gesture of appeal whose meaning no man could possibly affect to misapprehend.

Gwynett knelt by the side of the couch, and the comtesse, with a little cry of delight, linked her hands caressingly behind his neck.

"Ah, chevalier!" she murmured, "at all events I have not frightened you away. But confess that you would wish me a little less in earnest, and a little more like other women?"

"Comtesse, I confess that I think you have been exaggerating your misdeeds, if there are any, just to try me. Now that you see how little I judge you by ordinary standards, you must plead guilty to imposing upon me."

The comtesse shook her head.

"You are wrong, chevalier, and I would rather have a lover who knows all the truth than one who loves me in ignorance."

"I have never sought to know anything, comtesse."

"Yes. But till you know what I have been, and what I have done, you do not know *me*."

"Whatever I knew, it would make no shadow of difference, madame, believe me."

"I wish to believe, chevalier. But—I doubt."

"Test me, madame."

"Will you be my confessor, and hear my self-accusation?"

"If you wish it, comtesse. But to please you—not to please myself."

"Be it so. Listen, then, chevalier. What you have read in my hand, or in my heart—for in truth, after the things I have heard of you, I know not what other strange powers you may possess——"

"I claim none, madame. Be assured of that."

"But you do not deny? Never mind—whether you guess, or whether you divine, you are wholly right. I have had great ambitions, as you said—the ambition of wielding power has been, perhaps, the greatest of them. Twice I have sought to achieve empire. The first time—when I was at the court of Spain, where I expected to succeed easily—I failed. The second time, success appeared almost impossible. But I have not failed—yet."

"You are speaking in riddles, madame."

"Easily solved, chevalier. At Madrid, I sought to rule Spain, through the king. Here in Paris, five years ago, I determined to rule France through the only man I could hope to influence—M. d'Orléans. Therefore I determined from the first to put M. d'Orléans where he himself could rule—on the throne, or over the throne."

"But how, madame? Monseigneur was very far then from having any prospect either of the regency or the crown."

"That is my confession, chevalier. All those—except the little king—who stood between M. d'Orléans and power, I removed—M. de Bourgogne, madame de Bourgogne, M. de Berri, and, by inadvertence, the little duc de Bretagne also. Thus monseigneur is regent. Now, chevalier, you understand."

"It seems incredible, madame."

"Nay, chevalier, it was only a question of opportunity, and for opportunity I was always prepared. When one was not given me, I made it."

"Then all these were really poisoned, madame, as people said at the time?"

"Yes."

"And by you, madame?"

"By me."

"You have not lacked courage, madame."

"Any woman has courage who loves power, chevalier."

"And the future—is monseigneur to remain regent, or become king?"

"He shall become king the moment M. Dubois and I can bring about war with Spain—which will be in six months. That will make Philippe of Spain impossible, and the little king will no longer serve any purpose."

"All this is marvellous, madame."

"Only marvellous, chevalier? Does it not startle you, repel you? Speak frankly."

"I am only filled with admiration, madame. You have always been an adorable woman, but I am ashamed to see how little I have done you justice."

"Then you absolve and forgive me, chevalier?"

"Madame, it is I who should ask pardon for being so long blind to your goodness to me."

"Your blindness, chevalier, dates from the day we first met—in the courtyard of Versailles. Did you not guess that?"

"Never, madame."

"Before that meeting, believe me, I had had only one idea about love. It had always seemed to me a useful thing—on the part of other people. A madness of theirs, to be turned to account or ignored, as best suited my purpose. But from that day, chevalier, I knew in my heart of hearts that I was even as the men and women I had used, played with, or despised. And if I hungered and thirsted for power as never I had done before it was because power alone would make it possible to seek you, to find you, to win you."

"Madame, you kept your secret too well."

"Nay, chevalier, I betrayed it—once, at all events. Did they tell you that one night at M. de Torcy's, when monseigneur suddenly announced your death at St. Malo, the shock was too great for me, and I fainted? That was why,

when you called next day to say farewell, I refused to see you."

"It was cruel, madame, for that farewell might have been forever."

"You went on a hazardous enterprise, chevalier?"

"Yes, madame. But I had an urgent object, and risk was unavoidable."

"Promise me, chevalier, that in future you will not seek danger."

"On the contrary, madame, it is I who should ask you not to run needless risks."

"How, chevalier?"

"Madame, it is a matter of common notoriety that the symptoms of the deaths of all those whom you have destroyed were identical. From the moment Louis XV. dies in the same way, suspicion will point to you, who have so much to gain by his death, and who alone were of the household both of M. de Bourgogne and M. de Berri."

"I have thought of all that, chevalier, and depend upon it, no one shall suspect anything."

"It would take a good deal to reassure me on that point, madame. So much so that I would urge you to be satisfied with monseigneur as regent, instead of seeking to make him king."

"The regency is too precarious, chevalier, believe me—and besides, it can only last half a dozen years at the best. As to the risk, there is none, and I will show you why."

The comtesse rose from the couch, and walked across the room to a cabinet, from a secret drawer of which she took out a tiny leather box. In this was the little phial which Marie Latour had left on the occasion of her last visit but one. The comtesse came back with it in her hand, and resumed her place on the sofa.

"The poison I used formerly," she said, "was the only one I possessed, and I obtained it at Madrid from a man who has been dead some years. But fortunately, within the last few days, I have secured something entirely new, only just discovered, which was to go as a curiosity to monseigneur. Naturally I decided to keep it for myself. It is quite unknown to the world, is instantly fatal, and leaves no trace behind. There will therefore be no occasion, you see, for people to make comparisons, because there will be

nothing to compare. You are a chemist, chevalier, so it is easy for you to say if this can be recognized."

She held out the phial to Gwynett, who took it and opened the stopper.

A strong scent of the fragrance of peach-blossom floated out upon the air, and overpowered for a moment the perfume of the little fountain which was splashing in its basin in the middle of the boudoir.

"Judging by the smell, madame," replied Gwynett, "I should say it was unknown to me. After what you have described, it might perhaps be as well not to see what it tastes like."

The comtesse snatched the phial quickly from Gwynett's hand, replaced the stopper tightly, and put it back in the box on her lap.

"That is too dreadful a jest, chevalier," she said, with a little laugh. "You must submit to bridle your ardor for experiment while you are my guest. But you see I was right. This will keep people quite in the dark, if chemists like yourself find it unfamiliar. As for the doctors who are not chemists, what does it matter?"

"Madame, I have nothing to say."

"Then I have satisfied you?"

"Entirely, madame."

The comtesse gave a little sigh. Then with a smile she half raised herself, signed to Gwynett to put his arm behind her, and rested her head on his shoulder as he continued to kneel beside the couch. She lifted his right hand, kissed it, and placed it on her breast, murmuring,

"You have all my heart, chevalier. Tell me, is it worth having?"

A mist came before Gwynett's eyes, and for a moment his pulse beat so furiously that he felt almost suffocated.

"Certainly I have no time to lose," he said to himself.

Then he replied to the comtesse, in a voice which sounded strange even to his own ears,

"Madame, I swear to you that nothing but death shall part us."

The comtesse smiled as she looked up into Gwynett's face.

"Ah, chevalier!" she said, "that is said like a lover indeed."

She closed her eyes, and rested her head again on Gwynett's shoulder.

A silence fell upon the little room, broken only by the splashing of the fountain and the occasional sound of a bell from some distant clock tower. Gwynett's glance travelled round the walls, patterned by the shadows cast from the jewelled lanterns, and fell upon the rustling beadwork of the window-curtains, swaying to and fro in the warm night wind. Then he bent his face over the head of the comtesse, and breathed upon it slowly and steadily.

A minute or two passed. The comtesse heaved a sigh of contentment, half opened and then closed the lids of her violet eyes, and pressed Gwynett's hand to her breast.

A time-piece on a bracket near them struck half-past eleven. The comtesse started slightly at the sound, but her eyes remained closed.

Gwynett continued to breathe upon her head as it rested on his shoulder. Soon her bosom began to rise and fall with deep and regular inspirations, and her face assumed the calm of profound sleep.

He lifted his right hand gently. The comtesse took no notice, and the hand with which she had been clasping Gwynett's sank slowly to her side on the couch.

Silence reigned unbroken, and the calm breathing of the comtesse scarcely disturbed the almost perfect stillness of her recumbent form. From the house no sound of any kind had come during the evening.

Gwynett raised his head, and with a couple of the fingers of his right hand rubbed gently the top of the comtesse's forehead, among the roots of her hair. Her eyes slowly opened, and she heaved a deep sigh.

Gwynett took the phial out of the leather case where it rested on the lap of the comtesse, and passed it over to his left hand to hold while he withdrew the stopper. Then he said in a low, firm voice,

"You hear me, madame?"

"Yes."

"You will obey me?"

"Yes."

"Then listen. You will feel nothing, suffer nothing, know nothing."

"Yes."

"Lift your hand."

The comtesse raised her left hand. Gwynett placed the phial between her fingers, and said.

"Drink, madame."

The fingers of the comtesse closed round the phial, and she began to raise it to her lips. Then an expression of doubt and bewilderment came into her eyes, and her brow contracted.

"I—I——"

"Be at peace. Drink."

The face of the comtesse became calm again. She put the phial to her lips, and drank. Then her eyes closed, and her head sank down again. As it descended, the last remaining drops of the poison fell from the phial upon her breast, and stood in trembling spheres upon the ivory skin. Her fingers relaxed their hold, and as the phial rolled over the edge of the couch to the floor, the scent of peach-blossoms spread again through the still air.

Gwynett's heart almost ceased to beat as he gazed intently at the face and form resting so peacefully in his embrace. The comtesse lay perfectly still. For a moment or two she breathed as before, her bosom rose and fell, and one or two of the drops rolled swiftly down under her silken bodice and disappeared.

Then the movement ceased.

The color left the coral lips, and even in the rosy light from the hanging lamps it seemed to Gwynett that the dazzlingly fair skin had suddenly become a still paler ivory.

Making an effort, he laid his hand upon her heart to feel if it still pulsated. All was still.

With trembling fingers he drew the filmy folds of the bodice across the rounded breasts, lifted and put away with a shudder the case which had held the phial, and waited.

He still knelt with his left arm round the comtesse, supporting her head and shoulders, and he felt his burden grow slowly colder and colder till its icy weight became painful to endure. But the spell of a terrible deed rested upon him, and there seemed almost a sacrilege in disturbing the repose of the silent and rigid form still embraced by his arm and pillowed upon his heart.

Several minutes passed. The silence deepened, and the

light from the expiring lamps became dimmer. The little fountain sank down and disappeared. Gwynett remained motionless.

The stroke of midnight sounded from the clock on the bracket, and was echoed faintly from some distant church-tower. As the tones died away a slight noise caught Gwynett's ear, and he raised his head.

Footsteps came up behind him, and the voice of the regent was heard over his shoulder.

"My dear M. Gwynett," he said, "you have a method of despatching your friends to hell which is perfectly charming. I make you my compliments."



J. W. Hayes

CHAPTER XLV.

AFTERWARDS.

AT the regent's words Gwynett withdrew his almost numbed arm from behind the comtesse, allowed her head to sink gently back upon the cushions, and looked up inquiringly at the speaker.

The regent stood for some moments with arms folded, and an indefinable expression upon his face, as he gazed silently at the still form before him. Then he picked up the phial and its case, put them in his pocket, and remarked,

"I think, chevalier, it would be well for us to discover that something has happened to the comtesse, and to send for Dr. Vidal—who is sufficiently sharp-sighted to see nothing when desirable."

He placed the comtesse's lace wrap round her shoulders, as she had first worn it, and rang a bell. It was answered by the maid Ninette.

"Send for Dr. Vidal at once," said the regent. "Madame has had some sort of seizure, and is unconscious."

The maid disappeared hurriedly, and a minute or two afterwards came back with the house-steward.

"Can we be of any assistance, monseigneur?" she asked.

"I am afraid not. We must wait for the doctor."

As he spoke, the regent looked at Gwynett. The latter, interpreting the look, moved to the door, and said,

"You will permit me to wait his report before I leave, monseigneur?"

"I beg you will be so kind as to do so, chevalier."

Gwynett bowed, left the room, and descended the stairs to one of the reception-rooms on the ground floor, where he sat down. Shortly after he heard the arrival of the doctor, and his footsteps ascending to the boudoir. There was a few minutes' interval, and then the regent, followed by the doctor, came down to the room where Gwynett was waiting.

"M. Vidal thinks it must be a case of failure of the heart's action, chevalier," reported the regent.

"That is, in default of an autopsy," added the doctor. "But I confess I do not understand it. Madame's heart was perfectly sound."

"Then you think an examination is necessary, M. le docteur?"

"It is necessary if we are to know the cause of death with any certainty. For myself, I take the natural view that one ought to know as much as one can."

"In that case, M. le docteur," said the regent, "I will make a statement to you, which I need not say must be considered absolutely confidential."

The doctor bowed.

"It is this, M. le docteur. A little while before you were sent for, madame was showing us a small bottle of some preparation, which she said had just reached her—she did not state how—as a new discovery. This was it."

The regent took the phial out of his pocket, and handed it to Vidal.

"Something was said about its being intended for my laboratory, and then—before I could possibly interfere—madame put it to her lips and drank off some of the contents. M. le chevalier was a witness."

Gwynett nodded in confirmation.

"The effect," proceeded the regent, "was immediate and disastrous—in fact, the comtesse seemed to become unconscious instantly, and was to all appearance dead in a few seconds."

The doctor smelt the bottle.

"I don't know this," he remarked. "Do you, M. le chevalier?"

"Not in the least," replied Gwynett.*

"Under the circumstances, my dear M. Vidal," said the regent, "you will see that the results of an autopsy might be very embarrassing, and serve no purpose at all—more especially as nothing remains of this dangerous stuff. What was not swallowed was probably spilt on madame's dress or on the carpet beside the couch."

* The toxic element of oil of bitter almonds, now called hydrocyanic or prussic acid, was made known by Scheele in 1782.

"All this explains matters," replied Vidal. "That is, as far as I am concerned."

"Then you will say——?"

"What I said upstairs, monseigneur. It is impossible to contradict that, at all events. Everyone dies of failure of the heart's action."

The regent turned to Gwynett.

"We will go now, chevalier," he said.

The three men left the room, and passed out into the hall. Half a dozen of the servants were standing about, gossiping in low tones over the news which had just reached them.

"A most shocking end to our pleasant evening, chevalier," lamented the regent loudly, as they approached the entrance, attended by the major-domo. "By the way, M. Lescaut, you will put seals on madame's rooms and effects, pending the arrival of the members of her family. Nothing must be touched."

The major-domo bowed, and the regent left the house on foot, Gwynett accompanying him back to the Palais-Royal, and the doctor going off to his own house.

"My dear chevalier," said the regent, as soon as the doctor had left them, "you have laid me under an obligation that I can never discharge. Formerly you saved my life. To-night you have saved my honor. But for you, a king of France, of whom I am the guardian and protector, would have been murdered under my nose for my benefit, and I should have been rendered infamous for ever."

"Then you guessed, monseigneur?"

"Not at all—I heard. I was listening to you for the best part of an hour. But wait till we are indoors."

They were just entering the Palais-Royal, and the regent led the way to his cabinet. When they were seated, he went on,

"Although I confess to playing the eavesdropper, chevalier, you will probably acquit me of any feeling of jealousy as a motive for my indecorous behavior. That is not my way, as I daresay you will allow."

"I did not suppose it, monseigneur."

"As a matter of fact, I was a little uneasy about you. I heard from Dubois, just after you had left me to go to madame de Valincour's, that her invitation to you had fol-

lowed immediately on her learning the fact that you and Ambrose Gwynett were the same person. The possibility of her knowing and sympathizing with her brother's diabolical malignity against you in the latter character struck me at once, and filled me with suspicion about her motives—all the more as it was not certain but that your share in the circumstances of the abbé's death might somehow transpire in conversation."

"It appeared, monseigneur, that madame had no clear memory in connection with my name, although she had evidently heard it."

"Yes. But I did not know that, and her curiously strong affection for her brother left a good many possibilities open. My admiration for her never went the length of crediting her with any scruples, and I was not disposed to afford scope for any Corsican-like notions of the *vendetta*. I therefore gave up my idea of sleeping at Vincennes, and went to her house, entering it by the private stairs to her boudoir, of which I have a key—with the intention, of course, of relieving you from any embarrassing turn which things might have taken. When I entered the room——"

"You, monseigneur?"

"Yes. That is to say, I had just put my head between the *portières*, when I saw your very comfortable attitude——"

Gwynett was about to speak, but the regent went on,

"I was not criticising, my dear chevalier. But it was evident at a glance that my fears were altogether groundless, and I was withdrawing gracefully when madame made a statement of her programme about my regency. Naturally it interested me to hear that four members of our house had been assassinated for my benefit, and I decided to wait and hear the details. The rest you know; and, as I said before, I am infinitely obliged to you."

The regent went to a cabinet, brought out wine, and filled glasses for Gwynett and himself. Then he went back to his chair, took his snuff-box from his pocket, and helped himself meditatively to a pinch.

"I am rather curious, chevalier," he said, "to know the grounds for your action this evening. You will of course understand that I am not calling in question the sound-

ness of your judgment. I merely ask for information's sake."

"Monseigneur," replied Gwynett, "that woman was simply a demon. I felt sure that you would not wish or permit such a monster, whatever her relations might be with yourself, to escape justice. It is quite clear from what you yourself heard, to say nothing of other matters, that she had qualified herself for La Grève nearly half a dozen times over."

"I do not contradict you, chevalier. But what do you mean by 'other matters?'"

"A discovery I made, monseigneur, some short time before your arrival."

"What was that, if I may ask?"

"Nothing less than that the comtesse was the woman of the *messe noire*."

"What! Latour's customer?"

"Yes."

"Good God! Really that seems a little more horrible even than the other affairs. But how did you know?"

"Through a hint of Sanson's. He described to me a personal mark on the neck of the visitor who came to him for the candles—two little moles behind the right ear, one above the other. They are on the neck of the comtesse."

"That is quite correct."

"When I saw those, monseigneur, I determined, if it were possible, to learn more, and acted accordingly. A woman who had done that had probably done other things. Luckily, as you heard, the conversation led to an avowal of crimes of which, I take it, no one ever suspected the comtesse in the slightest degree."

"Never. Most of them, as it happened, were laid to my charge at the time."

"That was my impression. As to my own responsibility in the matter, I had a double reason for action. In the first place it was perfectly clear, from what Latour said, that the *messe noire* was devised on my account—I was the lover that the devil was to bring to madame la comtesse."

"It appears so."

"Therefore, monseigneur, I had to reckon with a woman

who was—as she thought—leagued with Satan to entangle me in a network of infamous treacheries.”

“That seems to give you a *locus standi*, I admit.”

“You will understand, monseigneur, that I could not dream of keeping silence, either about the *messe noire*, or the poisonings. But if I spoke, justice would have to take its course. In fact, such a woman was altogether too dangerous to be allowed to live.”

“I agree with you, on the whole. Of course there was the alternative of imprisonment for life. But that would have attracted attention.”

“If your highness happens to have incorruptible women jailers, of course imprisonment would have ensured safety, although not perhaps punishment.”

“Women jailers?” echoed the regent.

“Does your highness, knowing what you know, think that any man or set of men could have been trusted with her?”

“*Pardieu!* no—you are quite right. She would have seduced any of them, sooner or later.”

“I thought so.”

“But why, chevalier, take upon yourself the function of executioner?”

“Monseigneur, if I was right in thinking that this woman should not, and could not, escape the penalty of death for her crimes——”

“Granted fully, chevalier.”

“Then, monseigneur, it seemed to me that as she had to die, she would certainly—if she had to choose—prefer to die by my hand, without fear, pain, or even knowledge, rather than on the scaffold. That was why I killed her.”

“I do not say you were wrong. If you were, I am none the less thankful to you for relieving me of a frightful responsibility. But after all, chevalier, you might have failed—I take it your gift of inducing that trance-sleep will not operate with everyone?”

“By no means, monseigneur.”

“Then it might not have succeeded with the comtesse?”

“Not necessarily.”

“What would you have done in that case?”

“As to that, monseigneur, I do not think it would have made much difference. I had quite made up my mind, in

case the comtesse did not sleep when I wished, to offer her the alternative of taking the poison herself—or, if she refused, of being at once denounced to justice.”

“She might have repudiated her confession of the poisonings.”

“She could not have repudiated the two little moles. It was the *messe noire* that settled things—thanks to Sanson.”

The regent ruminated for a minute or two.

“I daresay you are right, chevalier. Of one thing you may rest assured—the comtesse would never have been aided by me to evade justice except by suicide, and she knew it. Therefore she would probably have accepted your offer, and killed herself—unless, by the way, she could have killed you in the meantime. However, as matters stand, I have escaped what makes me ill to think of, and I shall have nightmares for a month. Poor Louis de Bourgogne!”

The regent sighed heavily, and helped himself to another pinch of snuff.

“It was a little curious,” he said, “that the comtesse brought herself to be so candid, after all.”

“It was more than I expected,” replied Gwynett. “But I should explain that I was willing, with the whole force of my mind, that she should reveal something of her crimes. Whether that produced any effect, I cannot say. But the result was the same.”

A little later the regent rose to wish Gwynett good night, and the two separated until the morning.

The next day the comtesse’s sudden death was the talk of fashionable Paris, and M. de Torcy was one of the first callers at the Palais-Royal. After his condolences had been tendered, Gwynett was asked for, and gave his account of the recovery of the chests on board the *Fleur de Lys*. He detailed the steps taken for their security, and then remarked,

“I think, M. le marquis, you may take it that nothing more than I have told you can be learned from the Kermodes as to the real ownership of the treasure. I have come to Paris to see if you have more definite information.”

The marquis stroked his chin reflectively.

“It is not quite easy to decide offhand,” he said. “With

your permission, my dear M. Gwynett, I should like the opinion of monseigneur on the matter."

Gwynett took the opportunity of retiring to the laboratory, and M. de Torcy entered at once upon the discussion of the affair with the regent. He explained the circumstances of the bribe to the duke of Marlborough, and added,

"Of course the money was paid over originally to the duke. But if M. de Marlborough is a little too clever, and consequently loses his money, is it our business to take care of it for him?"

"For my part, I say not in the least."

"I happen to know," said the marquis, "that the duke was coquetting with M. de Galas fully a month after our interview at Eekeren. And those intrigues a little later with prince Eugène and Bothmar made it perfectly clear that he was ready to resume command in the Low Countries if he had the chance, in spite of his bargain with us."

"Well, what do you suggest?"

The marquis shrugged his shoulders.

"Monseigneur, if you want the money yourself, you have only to say so. Obviously M. Gwynett's impression is that the treasure has been ours all along, and he will be surprised if he is told anything else."

"Probably. On the other hand, marquis, it happens that M. Gwynett has recently done me a service which a hundred treasures like that of the *Fleur de Lys* would never repay. Some day I may tell you what it was. At present my idea is to leave the money with him by way of partial recompense."

"Monseigneur, do you by chance imagine that you will ever persuade M. Gwynett to accept anything for any possible services?"

The regent burst out laughing.

"Good Lord! no," he replied. "He is what I should call in the laboratory a non-absorbent. In a world of sponges, that is quite a curiosity. No, indeed—it is your business, my dear marquis, to manage the matter so that he will not smell a rat. I wash my hands of it."

"Do I understand, monseigneur, that you really wish M. Gwynett to keep this money?"

"I wish to do him a good turn without his knowing it, and this seems the only available way."

"Well, we can try. Let us go to the laboratory."

Gwynett was at work in his blouse and apron when the two gentlemen entered the laboratory.

"Chevalier," said the regent, "M. de Torcy has been explaining to me the nature of the service you rendered his late majesty—to a large extent without your knowing it—when you brought the *Fleur de Lys* to Calais. There were reasons then, as now, why those services cannot well be avowed to you. But they were so great that I am not surprised at his majesty desiring to express his recognition of them."

"Monseigneur, there was an end of that matter when he presented me with the brig."

"And its cargo," put in the marquis. "Permit me to say, chevalier, that we had reasons for not foreseeing exactly how much, or how little, of the treasure would be left in the brig when restored to you at the time specified when we hired it from you, and therefore we could say nothing about it. But the unforeseen delay in its restoration does not alter anything. You may accept my assurance that everything in the papers produced by captain Kermode was perfectly in order. In whatever condition you found the ship and its contents, they remain yours in every particular."

"There is no doubt about that," added the regent. "Whatever was intended to be retained by his late majesty was removed by yourself at Calais. The rest belongs to you."

"I do not understand it in the least," replied Gwynett.

"Monseigneur agrees with me," said the marquis, "that imperative reasons preclude our explaining ourselves more fully. But you are quite mistaken if you suppose that the French crown or government had any concern with this money."

"But who was the real hirer of the brig?" asked Gwynett, completely puzzled.

"His late majesty, of course."

"Then how did Kermode come to be in charge of it?"

The marquis smiled.

"Excuse me, chevalier. That is precisely our secret."

"I beg your pardon. But is there absolutely no other source of information open to me?"

"None that I am aware of."

Gwynett pondered a little.

"Possibly," he said, "the duke himself might know something. Unfortunately this recent seizure of his makes it impossible to approach him on the subject."

The marquis coughed drily.

"I understood you to say," he remarked, "that M. de Marlborough's safe-conduct to Kermode was made out in your name——"

"Certainly. But——"

"Permit me to hint, chevalier, that if M. de Marlborough should ever recover sufficiently to attend to affairs, he will scarcely care to be reminded of what was perhaps a little indiscreet of him—namely, safeguarding his late majesty's treasure-ship in time of open war. In the meanwhile, my dear M. Gwynett, I am afraid you must reconcile yourself to the fact of being a millionaire."

"It seems so," replied Gwynett rather discontentedly.

CHAPTER XLVI.

REQUIEM ÆTERNAM DONA EI.

THE funeral of madame de Valincour took place the next day, and was kept as private as possible out of consideration (as was reported) for the grief of the regent.

The police had shut up Marie Latour's shop on the night of the examination, and it was spread abroad that she had gone on a visit into the country. Justin's relatives, who had troubled themselves very little about him at any time, were told by the police that he had met with a fatal accident, and had been buried before his identity was discovered.

Gwynnett duly received from lord Stair his pardon under the great seal, together with a fresh authority for his own and Noel's presence in Scotland on his majesty's service. Armed with these he had no longer any motive for delaying his return to England, and so bade farewell to M. de Torcy and the regent.

The latter made no attempt to conceal his regret at losing his guest, and presented him at parting with a miniature of himself, set in a perfectly plain velvet case.

"Chevalier," he said, "this is the first time I have ever given away such a thing without a setting of diamonds. If your friends in England wonder at that, tell them that Philippe d'Orléans flatters himself he knows how to pay a compliment."

"You have hit it exactly, monseigneur. This portrait will be my most valued memento."

"In return, chevalier, make me a little present."

"Name it, monseigneur."

"As soon as you get back to Dorrington, send me a piece of the timber of the *Fleur de Lys*. I will have an inkstand made of it, in honor of your voyages in her, and the adventures resulting therefrom."

"It shall be done at once, monseigneur."

"And remember that you will always be welcome at the Palais-Royal so long as I am here to welcome you. After that, who knows? Perhaps some day I shall come knocking at your own door, as James II. did at St. Germain. You may depend upon it I would rather come to you than to your Hanoverian at St. James's, who cannot even speak French, and who would expect me to admire his mesdames Schulenburg, or Platen, or any other fat frumps he may have imported to illustrate his notions of female beauty. Adieu! and all happiness attend you."

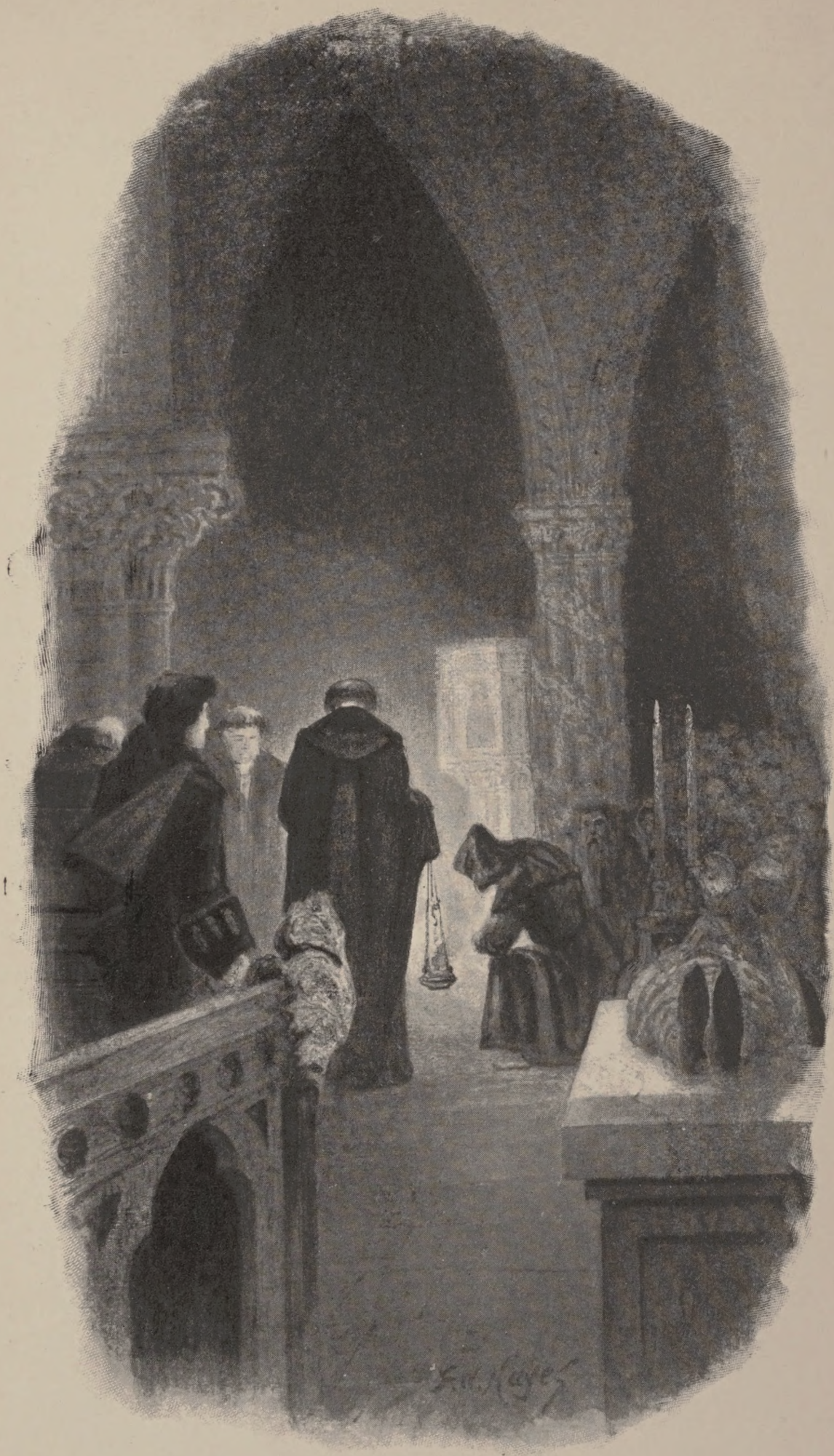
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Gwynett preferred to ride to Calais instead of travelling by post. On the first night after his departure, the sultry weather culminated in a violent thunderstorm which rendered the valley roads impassable. He was thus obliged to make almost the same detour as he had done when escorting the treasure wagons to Paris five years previously. The weather did not improve after the storm, but settled into steady rain with a chilly temperature and a universal gloom over the whole face of the country.

About noon of the second day, crossing the flat uplands near Doullens amid the cheerless downpour of rain, Gwynett came up behind a long procession of country people who were walking bare-headed. A dozen yards in advance of the procession there were two priests, carrying lighted candles which they sheltered under a sort of umbrella of leather, and before the priests a little acolyte rang a bell. Half-way between these and the train of followers walked a man dressed in a monk's frock, with a cowl drawn over his face, and his head bent downwards to the ground.

Just as Gwynett came up, the procession turned off down a side road to a parish church a few yards distant from the highway. Rather curious as to the nature of the function in progress, in which he could recognize nothing familiar, Gwynett dismounted, attached himself to the tail of the procession, and followed bare-headed like his companions.

At the church door a white-haired old curé stood awaiting, attended by two clerks bearing a cross and holy water. The two priests and the acolyte came up, and passed to one side. The man in the monk's dress advanced in his turn, and stood still,



The curé sprinkled him with holy water, and muttered the *De profundis*, ending, with raised voice,

“REQUIEM ÆTERNAM DONA EI, DOMINE, ET LUX PERPETUA LUCEAT EI.”

With the antiphon he turned and passed into the church, droning the *Miserere mei*. The monk followed, and, at a distance, the rest of the persons present. Gwynett wondered very much what the ceremony—which seemed to be that of a funeral with the coffin left out—could portend, and he decided to witness the conclusion of it. He therefore tied his horse to the lych-gate, and entered the church in company with an old farmer who brought up the rear of the procession.

The monk had advanced to the middle of the church, which was draped with black. A black mat was spread upon the floor, with trestles at each end, also draped with black. At each end of each trestle stood a silver candlestick with a wax candle.

The monk, at a sign from the curé, knelt in the centre of the mat, facing the altar. The acolyte lighted the four candles on the trestles, and the service proceeded until the responsory *Libera me, Domine* was reached. While this was being sung, the priest and his acolyte put incense in the thurible, and Gwynett whispered to his neighbor,

“My friend, what is this service?”

The old farmer seemed a little surprised, but replied,

“The service of the burial of the dead, monsieur.”

“Who is dead?” asked Gwynett.

“No one, monsieur.”

As this answer explained nothing, Gwynett looked round the church again, without however seeing any elucidation of the mystery. The choir sang the *Kyrie eleison*, and the priest advanced to the kneeling monk, whom he sprinkled thrice—on the feet, the shoulders, and the head—with holy water.

Then he returned, took the censer from the acolyte, and walked around the mat, incensing the kneeling figure as he did so.

“What has the monk to do with this service, my friend?” asked Gwynett of his companion.

“It is for him, monsieur.”

“What? this funeral service?”

"Yes, monsieur."

"Why?"

"Because after this he will be as one dead, monsieur."

"How is that?"

"Monsieur, he is a leper."

"A leper?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And is this service customary with all who are lepers?"

"It is performed when they are first discovered to be lepers, monsieur. From this church the leper is conducted to the Madeleine* on the heath, a couple of miles from here. There he must stay till he dies. As no clean person can be with him then, or bury him afterwards, the service is performed for him now."

Gwynett shuddered, and turned his eyes pityingly upon the sombre figure kneeling between the four candles.

The service in the church had now ended, and the procession was reformed to leave the building again. The priest and his colleagues passed out first, and the monk, taking up his mat, followed. Behind came the mourners and spectators as before, and Gwynett, leading his horse by the bridle, brought up the rear.

The rain fell in an unceasing drizzle, and through the downpour the procession plodded slowly along the side road till it became a mere track on a wide heath or common.

In the distance was a scattered line of stunted fir-trees, and amongst them a group of three or four dilapidated huts or sheds. To the nearest of these the priest led the way, and when the wretched hovel was reached the monk, passing on in front, stood near the doorway facing the rest of his escort. But his head remained always bent downwards to the ground.

The priest stooped down, took up a handful of earth, and threw it over the monk, saying in a loud voice,

"EGO SUM RESURRECTIO ET VITA; QUI CREDIT IN ME, ETIAM SI MORTUUS FUERIT, VIVET; ET OMNIS QUI VIVET ET CREDIT IN ME, NON MORIETUR IN ÆTERNAM."

The monk remained motionless.

*The "Madeleine" or "Ladriere" (so named from Magdalen and Lazarus or Ladres, the patron saints of lepers) was the dwelling or group of dwellings on the remote outskirts of a village within which lepers were rigidly isolated from their fellows until death overtook them.

The priest went on,

"REQUIEM ÆTERNAM DONA EI, DOMINE."

The choir responded,

"ET LUX PERPETUA LUCEAT EI."

"REQUIESCAT IN PACE."

"AMEN," sang the choir.

"ANIMA EJUS, ET ANIMÆ OMNIUM FIDELIUM DEFUNCTORUM PER MISERICORDIAM DEI REQUIEScant IN PACE."

And the choir sang again,

"AMEN."

The priest turned to one of his assistants, who bore a bundle of articles under his arm, and signed to him to put them one by one upon the ground in front of the monk. The man laid down successively a coarse black gown with a black hood and a red cross on the shoulder, a staff, a rope girdle with a bell attached to it, a sack, and a blanket.

The priest came forward and addressed the monk, saying,

"Brother, hear the commands of the Church and of the law, and obey them, on pain of death.

"You will live under this roof, and under no other, until you die.

"When you walk abroad, you will wear this gown, with its hood drawn down, and you will fasten this girdle, with its bell, around you.

"If you seek food from any man, you will carry this sack and staff, and with the staff you will point to the food you may see, or to the sack, that food may be put down for you.

"You will never approach within ten yards of any clean person. You will allow no part of your body to be seen at any time. You will never speak to any clean person, nor help him, nor receive help from him.

"You will not touch anything belonging to any man, nor enter any house. But you may hear mass through the lepers' window of the church."

He cast a glance round, and several persons brought forward small loaves, bags of grain, and other gifts of food or utensils, and laid them by the gown and staff.

Then the priest turned again to the leper, and said,

"Brother, if you have aught to say to me or anyone present, speak, seeing that it is for the last time."

The monk half raised his head, and his gaze wandered round the crowd. Then he shook his head in silence.

The priest raised his hands for a moment in silent blessing.

"Farewell," he said.

An echoing murmur came from the bystanders, and sobs could be heard from two or three of the women in the background. The leper remained motionless as before, his cowed head bent to the ground.

The priest waved his hand in sign of dismissal, and said, "It is finished. Depart, all of you, to your homes, and pray for the soul of this our brother."

The crowd began to break up and file across the common in the direction by which it had come. Gwynett turned to the old farmer, and asked,

"Are these huts kept for lepers, my friend?"

"Yes, monsieur. But I think they are all empty now."

He pointed to the farthest of the hovels, and added,

"Two women used to live there. But no one has seen them for months, so they are probably dead."

"Dead? what, in the hut there?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Has no one been to see?"

"God forbid! no."

"But if they are dead, will no one bury them?"

"No one, monsieur—unless it be père Germont."

"Père Germont? the curé of Ste. Marie Geneste?"

"He was curé there, monsieur."

"And where is he now?"

"Monsieur does not know, then? That is he," and he pointed to the leper.

Gwynett looked at him incredulously.

"*That* père Germont?" he asked.

"Assuredly, monsieur. Nobody knew till a day or two ago that he had the disease. It was found out by accident."

The old farmer moved off, and Gwynett watched him join the stragglers of the procession, now almost out of sight in the thick drizzle. Before he mounted his horse, he glanced once more at the still motionless figure of the leper, who in his turn stood watching the train of mourners disappearing across the sodden waste.

Behind him was the doorway of the miserable hovel in

which for the rest of his solitary life he was to live, and in which he was to die like a dog. Before him in a heap lay the symbols of his doom, the bell to sound in the ear of the shuddering wayfarer, the red cross to warn the eye, the staff to emphasize the leper's silent gesture when he begged for bread.

Gwynett mounted his horse, and came a little nearer to the leper. Then he took one of his pistols from his holster, and held it out.

"Mon père," he said, "you are probably considering whether the kind of life these people have left you is worth living. If it is not, this pistol is very much at your service."

Père Germont raised his head, and threw back his cowl. Gwynett could not repress a start of horror at the sight of the face thus for the first time revealed to his gaze.

"I thank you, monsieur," replied the leper. "But it is not necessary. I can die more comfortably than that, when I choose to die—thus."

He thrust his hand into a pocket of his vest, drew out a little bottle, and after showing it to Gwynett put it back again.

Gwynett returned his pistol to the holster, and asked,

"Is there any final service I can render you, mon père?"

The leper considered for a moment, and then replied,

"Monsieur, if you have the opportunity, I beg that you will tell what you have seen to my only relative—a niece who lives in Paris."

"What is her name?"

"Marie Latour."

"Marie Latour!"

"A perfumer, in the Rue Beauregard."

"Mon père, what you ask is impossible. Marie Latour is dead."

"Since when?"

"Five days ago."

"That is strange," muttered the leper.

"She was killed by a man whose child she confessed to have assassinated."

The leper looked up quickly, and then down again. After a pause, he said,

"Monsieur, in that case I should be glad if you will

write so much to one of her customers, madame la comtesse de Valincour."

"Mon père, she too is dead."

The priest started, and his right hand clutched at his breast. A minute passed silently. Then he said,

"There is only one other person who need know of my fate. It is madame de Valincour's brother, M. l'abbé Gaultier."

"M. Gaultier is dead also."

The priest uttered a hoarse cry, and flung out his hands with a gesture of despair.

"All dead!" he muttered. "And I—I live on. Accursed! accursed! accursed!"

Gwynett waited in silence for some moments, and then asked,

"Is there nothing else, mon père?"

The leper looked at him vacantly, recovered himself with an effort, and replied,

"Nothing, monsieur, I thank you."

Gwynett gathered up his reins, and drew his cloak round him. Then he uncovered his head, and said,

"Mon père, farewell—and may God have mercy on your soul!"

The leper laughed hideously, turned his back without a word, and went into the hut.

Gwynett shuddered, put on his hat again, and rode away.

On a distant ridge of the common he reined in his horse, and looked back at the hovel. Dimly through the murk he could distinguish a grey spot relieved against the gloomy background of the doorway. It was the face of the leper, gazing at the retreating form of the last man with whom he should speak on earth.

Then the grey spot vanished, and Gwynett turned his horse to resume his journey. The rain continued to fall without ceasing, and presently the Madeleine of Ste. Marie Geneste disappeared on the desolate horizon.

CHAPTER LXVII.

BACK AT DORRINGTON.

WELL, my dear fellow," remarked Dorrington, "now that you have been pardoned for being not guilty of a crime that was never committed, and can walk abroad without any risk of wearing another hempen cravat, what are your arrangements?"

Gwynett looked at Muriel, who was walking towards them with Avice, and replied,

"We have decided, sir, to wait Noel's answer—in person, I hope—to my letter written to him from London. If he and Avice like to have their wedding at once, we will all be married together—if not, with your permission Muriel and I propose not to wait any longer than is necessary to put Thornhaugh in comfortable trim for its mistress. That I shall have to attend to at once, in any case, and I think of leaving for Kent to-morrow."

Muriel came up, and took a seat between her father and her *fiancé*.

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

"An old story, my dear. Once upon a time there was an unfeeling daughter, who, having been separated from her father for more than twenty years, had no sooner met him again than——"

Muriel put her hand over his mouth.

"There, that will do," she said. "As if Ambrose and I would hear of your living anywhere but with us at Thornhaugh!"

"And what is to become of Dorrington? Do you suppose the folks here will allow me to desert them again, and not grumble?"

"We can all come here now and then, as we did from Wray Manor. Aunt Rostherne will make an admirable *châtelaine* for you, to say nothing of enjoying a little irresponsible despotism when you are away."

"Certainly she has taken very kindly to the idea of wield-

ing the sceptre here after your departure. But now, my dear fellow, there is the other point. What are you going to do with the treasure here?"

"I have not the slightest idea," replied Gwynett. "Those people seem determined to force it upon me, and there it is. What can I do?"

"A million sterling is a good round sum to be credited with. You will be astonished to find how it will increase your intelligence and your virtue, when people get to know of it. All your peccadilloes—which Muriel has yet to discover—will be whitewashed, and the words of your mouth will be likened unto Solomon's. You need only aver that two and two make five, and everybody will agree with you in the most charming way. If Muriel does not contradict you, I am sure no one else will, and your argumentative powers will atrophy for want of exercise. And how you will be loved by the people who hope to borrow money of you some day. Certainly, it is a fine thing to be a millionaire."

"You are quite right," replied Gwynett, with a long face. "I have thought of it all myself, and it is simply sickening. Before this cropped up, I was perfectly happy in being Ambrose Gwynett of Thornhaugh, and, having Muriel, I want no more. Wherever I have gone, people have taken me for myself, and for no other reason, and I have had no occasion to grumble. Now, if this money is in question, one will always be wondering how much of what happens, happens on account of the money."

"Nothing can prevent that."

"Unless I get rid of it."

"For example?"

"Well, I could hand it over to the crown."

"A good idea. Walpole would be delighted—a perfect godsend for him. Instead of buying the votes of merely sixty or eighty members of Parliament, he would be able to bribe half the House for the next dozen years at least."

"I could use it for the relief of poverty."

"That would be fine news for the tramps and cadgers from Land's End to John o' Groat's House. Gad! Kent would be chock-full of them in six months—and a good riddance for the rest of the country. They will put up a statue to you, if the money holds out long enough."

"There are hospitals or colleges to be endowed."

"In other words, a whole gang of people who are now merely comfortably off are to be made wealthy for nothing. As for the patients or the scholars, who the deuce is going to look after their interests? One would like to know how much of the straw for the poor wretches at Bedlam escapes being stolen."

"It could not do much harm if I spent it in diamonds for Muriel."

"I would not wear a single stone," replied Muriel. "How was all this gold obtained? By the toil and torture and death of the wretched slaves of Mexico and Peru. Every pistole reeks with tears and blood. For myself, I would rather never benefit by a penny of the money."

"That is a new view," said Dorrington. "It is the first time I have heard that the English guinea has irreproachable antecedents, and that the gold coming from the West African coast is acquired in the most pious and gentlemanly fashion."

"Now you are laughing at me."

"It is no laughing matter, and I request that you and Ambrose will at your early convenience make up your minds about these boxes. It is a serious responsibility to be their custodian."

"There is unfortunately no property in the market near Thornhaugh," meditated Gwynett, "and I have no fancy for merely holding land on which I cannot reside."

"The manor here is as large as I care about," remarked Dorrington, "so I am afraid I cannot help you in that way."

"Really I am quite at a loss," said Gwynett. "I very much wish, Mr. Dorrington, that you would take over the whole money yourself, as treasure-trove of the manor."

Dorrington turned very red.

"The devil!" he ejaculated angrily. "Am I to understand, sir, that in your opinion what is not good enough for Gwynett of Thornhaugh is good enough for Dorrington of Dorrington?"

Gwynett was quite taken aback by this interpretation of his offer.

"My dear sir," he protested, "I had not the slightest intention of suggesting anything of the sort. I only meant to appeal to your judgment from my own, which I confess

fails me altogether. To be brief, I have no use for the money. I am altogether doubtful of doing anything but harm if I did use it, and above all things it revolts me to run the slightest risk of being esteemed for my money rather than myself. Why, therefore, should not the treasure remain where it is? That little recess can be solidly walled up and panelled over, and the chests will be buried there for good and all, until perhaps one day occasion may arise to put the treasure to some satisfactory use. No one but ourselves knows what is in the boxes, and I suppose we can keep the secret."

"I see no objection to that," replied Dorrington, in a mollified tone. "But you will be kind enough to acquit me of all responsibility if thieves break through and steal. And it seems to me rather amusing to call something a secret which is known to at least four persons—and one of them a woman."

EPILOGUE.

THE middle of the month of June, 1722, witnessed a spectacle never presented in Great Britain before or since.

London and its suburbs were for several days blocked with an army of visitors from the provinces; while all the roads for a hundred and fifty miles out of the metropolis were darkened by a continued stream of foot-passengers and riders making their way with one accord towards Pall Mall. Business was stopped all over the country, and among those who travelled Londonwards as among those who stayed at home, one subject alone occupied all minds and all tongues.

No one thought or spoke, but of a dead man. For at his house in Pall Mall the great duke of Marlborough, who had died at Holywell on June 16th, was lying in state, and the whole nation was doing his dead body homage.

On the last evening during which the public were admitted to Marlborough House to look upon the face of the departed here, a tall man of between fifty and sixty years of age made his way through the enormous crowd which blocked Pall Mall, and took up his stand to wait until the last of the visitors had passed the portals on their way out of the building. As soon as the great door was closed, the man went to the side entrance and rang the bell. After a short conversation with the janitor, emphasized by the transfer of a handful of guineas to the latter's pocket, the visitor gained admittance. Once inside, he was handed over to another servant, who took charge of a note which was given to him, and then led the way to the apartment where the duke's body lay in state. Here he left the visitor alone, and disappeared.

The dusk of the twilight had given place to night, and the great room was lit only by the two tall tapers at the head of the coffin. The visitor took his stand by its side, and waited.

Presently a door leading to the private part of the house

opened, and a woman in widow's weeds appeared on the threshold. It was the duchess of Marlborough.

She advanced slowly to the bier, with an expression upon her face in which grief, anxiety, and defiance were strangely blended. At the other side of the coffin, she stopped and gazed steadily at the visitor, apparently seeking in her memory for something to aid her recognition of him. Then her brow contracted for a moment, and the visitor saw that he was remembered.

He bowed profoundly, stood erect again, and drew from his pocket an old letter. This he unfolded, and held out across the bier under the light of the tapers, inviting the duchess, by a glance, to inspect it.

After a moment's pause she took a step forwards to bend her head over the faded characters. Then she raised it again, looking at the visitor with an expression of mortal defiance.

He still continued to hold out the letter, obviously in order that she might take it. But in silent reply she clasped her hands behind her, and gazed at him defiantly as before.

Then the visitor bowed again, extended his hand, and set the letter alight at one of the tapers. It flamed out brightly, burnt away, and shrivelled up into black fragments.

As these fragments broke and floated downwards, some of them fell on the breast and shoulders of the dead duke. The duchess started, and opened her clasped hands with a suppressed cry. But the visitor stretched out his hand with a solemn gesture of arrest.

"Ashes to ashes," he murmured.

The duchess sank on her knees beside the bier, and buried her face in its sombre draping.

The visitor stepped back, and made his way with silent footsteps to the door by which he had entered. With his fingers on the handle he turned to look at the duchess, as she knelt with bowed head and arms outstretched over the still form on the bier.

Then he passed out, and went away. In the silence of the night the mourner remained, still kneeling, alone with the mighty dead.

THE END.

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